



Purple & Orange?
#7

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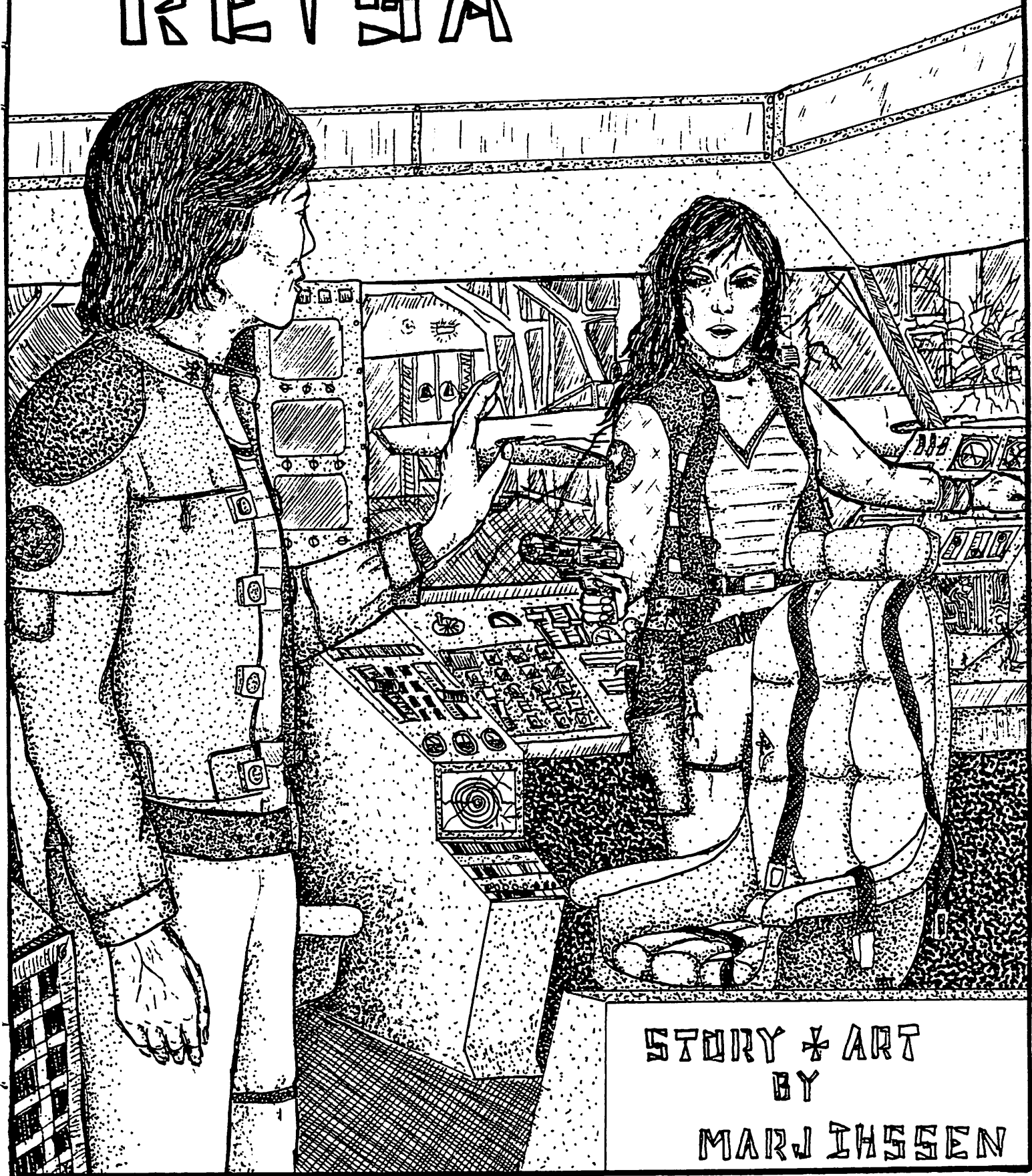
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EPISODE GUIDE

The following is a list of all episodes of BATTLESTAR GALACTICA, as of the end of the 1978/79 television season, along with their broadcast dates.

9/17/78	"Battlestar GALACTICA"	1/28/79	"The Man with Nine Lives"
9/24/78	"Lost Planet of the Gods" (Part I)	2/18/79	"Murder on the RISING STAR"
10/01/78	"Lost Planet of the Gods" (Part II)	2/25/79	"Greetings from Earth"
10/08/78	"The Lost Warrior"	3/11/79	"Baltar's Escape"
10/15/78	"The Long Patrol"	3/18/79	"Experiment in Terra"
10/22/78	"The Gun on Ice Planet Zero" (Part I)	4/01/79	"Take the CELESTRA"
10/29/78	"The Gun on Ice Planet Zero" (Part II)	4/08/79	"Fire in Space" - repeat
11/12/78	"The Magnificent Warriors"	4/29/79	"The Hand of God"
11/19/78	"The Young Lords"	6/02/79	"The Living Legend" (Part I) - repeat
11/26/78	"The Living Legend" (Part I)	6/09/79	"The Living Legend" (Part II) - repeat
12/03/78	"The Living Legend" (Part II)	6/16/79	"The Young Lords" - repeat
12/17/78	"Fire in Space"	6/23/79	"The Long Patrol" - repeat
12/24/78	"Lost Planet of the Gods" (Part I) - repeat	7/07/79	"The Gun on Ice Planet Zero" (Part I) - repeat
12/31/78	"Lost Planet of the Gods" (Part II) - repeat	7/14/79	"The Gun on Ice Planet Zero" (Part II) - repeat
1/14/79	"War of the Gods" (Part I)	7/21/79	"War of the Gods" (Part I) - repeat
1/21/79	"War of the Gods" (Part II)	7/28/79	"War of the Gods" (Part II) - repeat
		8/04/79	"The Man with Nine Lives" - repeat

REISA



STORY ✕ ART
BY

MARJ IHSEN

"Reisa"

(By Marj Ihssen)

The freighter lurched to one side. Desperately, Reisa fought the controls, sending the ship into maneuvers it had never been designed for. Cylon fire jarred the ship, causing controls to flash wildly. Outside, Reisa could see Thon, her husband, hurling his aged Starhound fighter at their pursuers.

"Thon, on your tail!" she warned.

"I know," he replied, taking his fighter in front of the freighter. A flurry of laser fire, and the Cylons were destroyed, but two other ships dove on the freighter, and Reisa cursed as an engine went dead.

"Thon!"

"I see," he answered. "There are four more Raiders on the way in, maybe more. My scanner's damaged."

"Felgercarb! Bad odds."

"Impossible odds. How's your cargo holding up?"

"Not well. We've lost two holds, and the survivors aren't in very good shape. Those ore compartments were never designed for human cargo." No need to mention the circumstances that had sent them on this desperate flight, or the four freighters that had never made it from the atmosphere of Vandis. Or that Marcus, their son, had been in one of those ill-fated freighters.

"With that engine gone, you're far too slow."

"Yeah, tell me!" Hands flew over battered controls, drawing the last bit of speed from the faltering ship. Bracing herself, Reisa took the freighter into a tight turn that left her flying at her pursuers -- the same pursuers who'd dogged them across the whole quadrant.

The Vandis mining colony hadn't been unprepared for the Cylon attack, but they hadn't the strength to stand against a base star. They'd made the Cylons work for their victory, but the result was inevitable. A few ships escaped; others stayed behind to sabotage the mines which made Vandis such a valuable prize. One group took several old asteroid miners against the base star, buying its destruction with their own deaths. The Cylons paid dearly for Vandis and chased the fleeing ships across the quadrant in retribution.

The freighter and the Starhound bore down on the Raiders, and the enemy scattered in confusion. In the ensuing clash, both ancient ships were hit. The fighter sustained engine damage, and a Cylon blast scored the side of the freighter, sending metal fragments ringing through the pilot's compartment.

Reisa shook blood from her eyes. Frak! There, in her sights -- a Cylon! But

before she could fire, a laser blast from behind sent the Cylon flaming away. At first she thought it was Thon, but, no, that wasn't a Starhound -- it was a Viper! Two Vipers! The sleek ships soared overhead and joined the Starhound. Against their precision maneuvers and faultless aim, the incoming Raiders had no chance.

"Where in Hades did you guys come from?" Thon hailed them. "Did you arrive just in time!"

"Blue Squadron from the GALACTICA," was the reply.

"The GALACTICA out here? What...? Oh, frak!" Thon's damaged engine began to flare. "Hey, do you know a pilot named Starbuck? He was stationed..."

"This is Starbuck. Who's that?" the other Viper pilot answered.

"Thon, Starbuck. Hey, I don't think this thing's gonna make it much farther. Look after Reisa for me, will you?"

"Yeah, sure, but you'll make it."

"Don't bet any cubits on it." Thon's voice was tight as he fought to keep his ship under control. "Get that freighter back safe, hotshot. It's all that's left of Vandis."

"Thon! Thon!" But Thon's fighter twisted away and suddenly exploded.

Saddened, Starbuck watched the debris fall behind. He and Thon had been friends a long time ago, back in Academy days, when they'd met on the triad circuit. Come to think of it, Apollo should remember Thon. Starbuck turned to check on his friend. Sight confirmed Apollo's Viper tucked in next to the freighter. Starbuck thumbed his comlink to the civilian frequency and found Apollo talking the freighter pilot in.

"Easy... Easy... Just hold that course. Gently, now... Gently... We're not far now..."

Starbuck quietly followed the pair in. The freighter was small enough to fit into the supply bay. After landing, Starbuck went to help unload the survivors. He was puzzled to note a med team standing idle in the corridor outside the pilot's compartment.

"What's the hold-up?"

"We ain't goin' in there, not 'til the Captain gets 'er settled down. She wants to take this thing out again, keeps screaming for someone named Thon," a tech answered wryly.

Premonition touched Starbuck. Captain? Apollo? And Thon? Carefully, he eased to the compartment door. Apollo was standing very quietly, talking soothingly, never taking his eyes off the laser pointed in his direction. The pilot -- was that Reisa? -- was ignoring what Apollo was saying and was arguing with Core Control about launching. Apollo tried to inch closer, and the laser unerringly followed his movement.

"Forget it! I'm going back after Thon, and no mere Captain is going to stop me! Get off my ship!" the woman raged at Apollo.

That's Reisa, all right, Starbuck thought. He noted the blood staining her uniform -- she was in no condition to go anywhere. Apollo hadn't noticed his friend at the door, having eyes only for the laser threatening him. Starbuck swiftly drew his weapon and, before she could turn and fire at him, stunned Reisa. Apollo caught her as she sagged to the deck. Highly irritated, he turned to Starbuck as the med techs hurried in, an angry question in his eyes.

"That's Reisa. You remember, Thon's wife," Starbuck told him, holstering his laser. "She always did have a talent for trouble!"

His anger fading, Apollo shook his head. "Yes, I remember." He turned to look toward where the med techs were loading Reisa onto a stretcher and bandaging the gaping wound in her side. "I don't think she knows Thon's dead," he said quietly. "She wanted to go back out to rescue him..." Apollo paused, remembering his brother's death.

Starbuck stayed with his friend for a few centons, then hurried to Life Centre to check on Reisa. He remained until Dr. Salik assured him she was out of danger, although her injuries were extensive and it would be quite some time before she was up and about. Then he pushed her to the back of his mind.

Heavy Cylon attack activity forced the Warriors to their limits for sections, pulling tempers dangerously short. They fought and flew double patrols until they nearly fell asleep in their cockpits.

As soon as she received premission from Dr. Salik, Reisa put in her application for flight duty. The results were anything but what she expected. The recruiting officer spent nearly twenty centons lecturing her on "falsifying" records, on "socialators" flying, and on how women were basically unfit for combat -- too soft and too fragile.

"Soft?" Reisa's temper hit the boiling point. "Fragile? Like this?" She reached across the desk and jerked the officer's arms back in the come-along hold she'd often used on Vandis. Ignoring his protests, she hauled him down to the launch bay, where, with a little "persuasion," he requested a training Viper "to test a pilot's skills." She launched without clearance, then put the Viper through all the standard maneuvers, as well as several specialised heavy-gravity techniques she'd learned from Thon.

"This isn't so different from some of the other ships I've flown," she cheerfully commented to the recruiting officer, who was clutching his seat in a death grip and alternating in colour between purple and green. Taking his silence as disbelief, Reisa sent the Viper hurtling toward a returning patrol and challenged the pilots. Ignoring their protests, she fastened her ship to the lead pilot's tail and challenged him to "shake her off." The pilots were highly confused, uncertain whether to accept her challenge or just ignore her.

Core Control was almost screaming as the GALACTICA ordered the pilot in the training Viper to return immediately to the launch bay. Total confusion reigned.

Radio communications within the Fleet were normally kept to a minimum, so the blast of sound that reached the incoming patrol was a shock to Apollo and Starbuck.

"Have they lost their minds?" Apollo wondered, trying to get a clear channel to Core Control.

Starbuck was listening to the frantic calls. "It seems someone's taken a training Viper out without clearance and is challenging one and all."

"Whoever he is, he's totally disrupted the landing pattern, and we've several cadet training flights out." Apollo took his ship curving in toward the training Viper, now doing aerobatics in front of the GALACTICA. His voice crackled over the hailing frequency. "This is Flight Commander Apollo. You are ordered to land at once!"

The offending Viper looped around, reappearing behind them and neatly affixing itself to Starbuck's tail. "I challenge!" came the mocking answer. Instinctively, Apollo and Starbuck broke apart, Apollo circling to come up behind the training Viper.

"You are ordered to land immediately, or I will open fire!"

The Viper broke from Starbuck's tail and streaked away in a dizzying display of defensive and evasive maneuvers, some an awed Starbuck had never seen before. But it was useless. Despite the pilot's consummate skill, Apollo stayed glued on his tail, finally sending a laser volley alongside to convince the pilot of his sincerity. The training Viper meekly headed back to the GALACTICA.

There was a security force waiting in the landing bay, and as Apollo scrambled from his Viper, intending to give the pilot a dressing down, they led him -- well, her -- away. Apollo paused long enough to note the hair that cascaded down when the unidentified pilot's helmet was removed. He turned to find Starbuck beside him.

"What are you grinning about?" Apollo snarled.

Startled, Starbuck wiped the grin from his face. "She sure can fly!" he observed.

"Who was that?"

"Reisa, of course," Starbuck answered over his shoulder as he followed the security team out of the landing bay.

His rage barely under control, Apollo joined him. Of all the idiotic, stupid, dangerous things to do... The two Warriors entered the briefing room behind the security patrol. Reisa faced Commander Adama and a very angry Tigh.

"Just what do you think you were doing?" the Colonel demanded.

Reisa drew herself up to attention, hoping he noticed her rank of Lieutenant Colonel, and spoke as to an equal. "The recruiting sergeant refused to be-

lieve my credentials, Colonel. I was merely proving my skill."

"Recruiting sergeant?" Tigh looked at the security patrol.

"He's in Life Centre, sir. It took two of us to pry him loose from the seat," the patrol leader replied, smothering a grin. "It seems she forced him to requisition a ship, then took off with him."

"That is hardly an excuse." Tigh walked around her, examining her like an insect on a tray, then proceeded to read her the proverbial riot act, leaving her feeling about three inches tall. As he paused for breath, Adama interrupted.

"If the lady feels that strongly about flying, then we should give her the opportunity to fly." He turned to Reisa, his voice stern. "But you will have to go through standard cadet training. No shortcuts. And you will have to manage to stay out of trouble." He studied her for a micron, then shook his head, satisfied. "Dismissed."

Reisa leaned against the wall outside the briefing room. Whew! Talk about being busted in rank -- from lieutenant colonel to cadet. She'd been so mad at that recruiting sergeant, she hadn't stopped to think of the possible results of her escapade. Still, she'd gotten what she wanted -- she'd fly a Viper, kill Cylons to send as an honour guard for Thon and Marcus. But she'd have to put up with cadet training first -- and that stuck-up Captain! Oh, frak! She straightened as she spotted Apollo approaching. He was still fuming.

"Cadet!" She came to attention. "Classes start in two centars." He stopped and surveyed her worn Ranger's uniform. "And report in proper uniform," he added, then stalked off.

Reisa was sputtering in anger when muffled laughter interrupted her. She turned, to find Starbuck leaning against the wall behind her.

"Still the same old Reisa. Can't you ever stay out of trouble?" Ignoring her angry movement as he slid his arm around her shoulders, he continued. "Come on. I think I can find you something fit to wear." He led her down the corridor toward the pilots' quarters. "Welcome aboard -- Cadet."

Need Uniform Trim?

Can't Find Buckles?

Black/gold and black/silver checked uniform trim. Not the original, but a close handwoven copy.

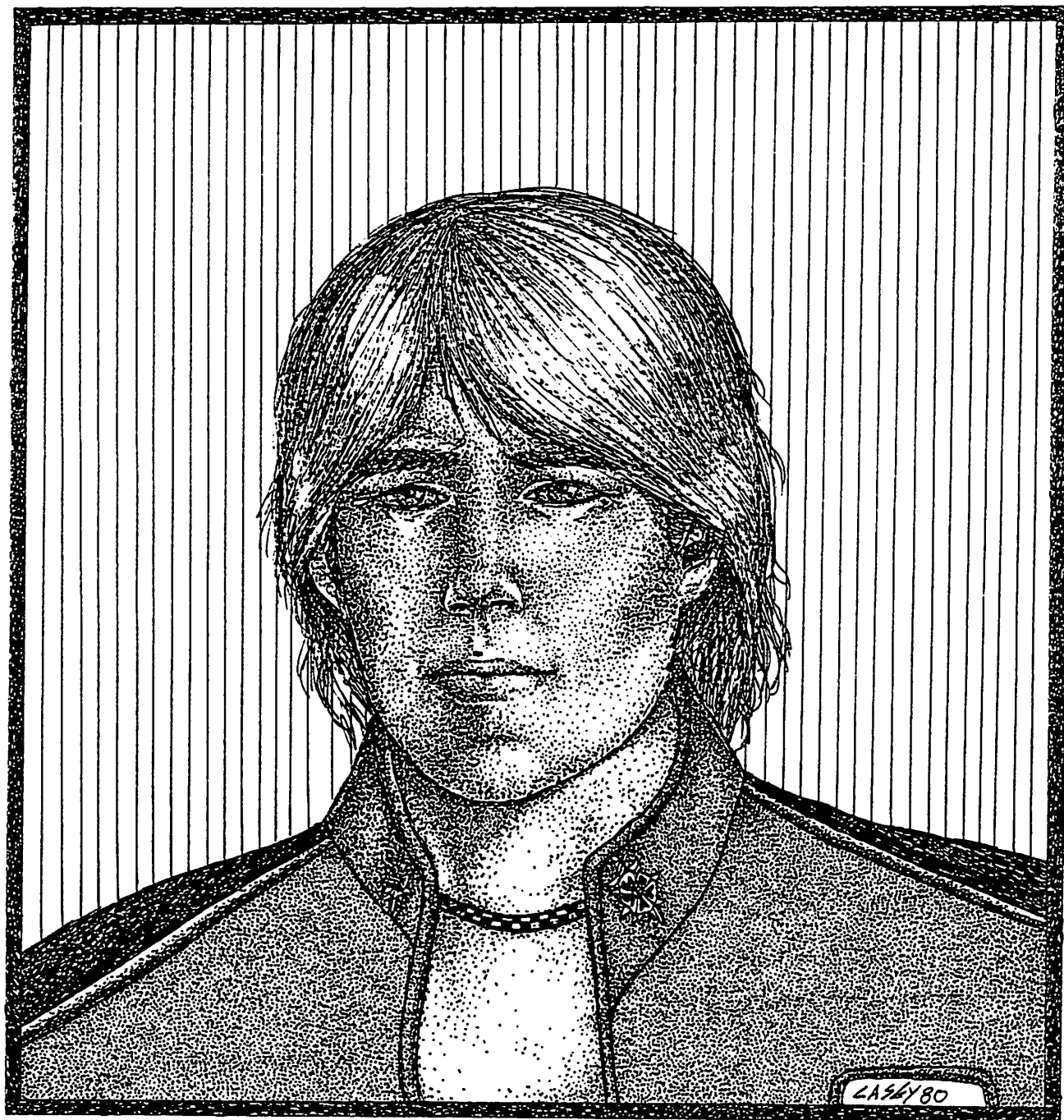
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MORGAN



"Morgan"

(By David Morgan)

A young man, tall and lean, with bright golden hair and intense green eyes, sat before a computer console, scowling at the screen.

"Colonel's orders!" he muttered angrily. "Blast the meddling Colonel -- and her orders! What in Hades am I supposed to tell this stupid thing? A biography, for Sagan's sake! 'Something for the personnel computers.' By all the Lords, I've heard a lot of felgercarb in the military, but this... It's utterly inexcusable, a flagrant violation of privacy!"

Morgan was fuming, and not very quietly. The idea of recording his life history where anyone might have access to it aroused more than a little resentment. But the Flight Commander had ordered the OSIRIS combat personnel to record their pre-mission biographies, since all tapes had been lost in the destruction of the Colonies. There were to be no exceptions.

Morgan couldn't help resenting the order. Beneath a superficial flamboyance, he was a very private person, and he considered his personal life his own affair, except where it affected those around him. To be ordered to talk about his past, to make it a matter of more or less public record...

"All right, damn her! She can have her blasted 'biography' -- but it sure as Hades isn't going to tell her anything new!"

Morgan took a deep breath to calm himself, then picked up the small microphone and activated it. He was going to make this as brief as possible.

"Personal biography, Lieutenant Morgan, Purple Squadron, battlestar OSIRIS," he began in a flat monotone. "Additional rating, astrosurvey tech, second class." He paused for a micron, then began his formal statement, following the outline specified in the Flight Commander's orders.

"I was born thirty-two yahrens ago in Caprica City. My father, Alioth, was a senior astrophysicist at the Caprican Science Centre. My mother, Dyone, was a professional sentiologist, specialising in early Colonial cultures."

Again, Morgan paused, this time switching off the microphone as he permitted himself to think back over his childhood. He remembered his mother only vaguely -- a tall, attractive woman, not beautiful, but with a vitality apparent even in the still, lifeless images his father had shown him. She died in a cave-in at an archaeological site on Virgon before he was three yahrens old.

Alioth never seemed to get over his wife's death. Independently wealthy, he retired from the Science Centre and devoted all his time to his only child, fostering in Morgan an unquenchable thirst for knowledge -- and an abiding love for the stars.

Yahrens of private tutors guaranteed a thorough background, and Morgan became

the youngest student ever accepted at the Caprican Science Centre. He probably worked harder than any other student there, too, determined to learn everything there was to learn, in every scientific discipline he could qualify for. Astrophysics was his special love, though, and before he was twenty his theories of stellar evolution were revolutionising the field.

Then a Cylon raid killed his father, destroyed his home. Morgan left the Centre -- and used his already impressive scientific credentials to gain acceptance at the Caprican Military Academy.

Several yahrens older than his fellow cadets, Morgan had to prove himself all over again. If possible, he worked even harder than he had at the Centre, and his efforts were rewarded in two ways. He graduated at the top of his class -- and he was accepted for the OSIRIS mission.

"I attended the Caprican Science Centre, then the Military Institute. After receiving my commission, I volunteered for the exploration mission of the battlestar OSIRIS, where I have served for the past four yahrens."

With the microphone inactive once more, Morgan glared at the silent computer screen. "There! And that's all the silly frimp's going to get! I hope she finds it enlightening!"

There was more, of course. A lot more. In four yahrens aboard the OSIRIS, Morgan had earned the liking and respect of most of his fellow Warriors. He was a truly exceptional pilot, capable of flying anything short of a battlestar. He was daring, innovative, apparently reckless at times -- but he always knew exactly what he was doing. He had more Cylon kills than anyone else on board, even his squadron commander, and he was always ready to fly to another pilot's aid. He was never aloof, but somehow he was able to keep himself apart. No one really knew him.

Morgan wanted it that way. He never talked about himself if he could avoid it, and he never said much about his past. Even his friends knew only the barest essentials -- basically, what he'd told the computer. They flew with him, fought at his side, cheered him on the triad courts, worked and studied with him. But they didn't know him.

Dyone had been far more than just a renowned sentiologist. She was perhaps the top cultural expert in the Colonies -- and for two very good reasons. She was an expert in telekinesis. And she was a telepath.

So was her son.

Morgan's abilities were limited, but extremely valuable, and he was careful never to abuse them. He was aware of the dangers -- the temptation to pry into the minds of others, to manipulate them, to acquire wealth, influence, power. He considered such abuse inexcusable, and flatly refused to allow anyone to exploit his talents. The best way to prevent that exploitation was to keep his paranormal abilities secret.

When the OSIRIS left the Colonies on her open-ended mission, Morgan found himself a place where he could work unobserved. He reserved one of the battlestar's celestial chambers as his private lab, and never allowed anyone else to enter it. After the first few sections of the mission, no one tried. His sci-

entific reputation was enough to ensure at least that much privacy.

Morgan went to that celestial chamber as soon as he finished recording his short biography. He needed time to compose himself, to reestablish some semblance of outward calm. The few centons spent with the computer had upset him badly, forcing him to remember things he'd long wanted to forget, to think of things he preferred not to consider. His past was over, finished, dead. He wanted to be alone.

An absent-minded gesture as he turned to seal the hatch behind him, and the dome opened, its controls untouched. Morgan stood silently for a long time, staring out at the stars, not really seeing them, trying to will himself to relax. Then he closed his eyes.

An image formed in his mind -- a tall, slender woman, her fine features framed by a cloud of long, unruly red curls. She was sitting on a cushion in her personal quarters, ignoring the chair as he knew she often did. There was a remote computer microphone in her hand, a thoughtful expression on her face. As he watched, a tiny violet creature smaller than his hand landed on her shoulder, and she looked up, sudden laughter in her green eyes.

Morgan sighed, opening his eyes and dispelling the image. Diana...

He'd met her at the Academy on Caprica, where they'd both worked in astrophysics. Morgan had to take her course; Diana had to put up with him. Mutual respect, born during that first yahren, led to mutual liking...

Not many people knew Diana as he did, Morgan realised. Nearly everyone aboard the OSIRIS thought her cold, unemotional, utterly without feeling -- a woman of ice, not flesh and blood.

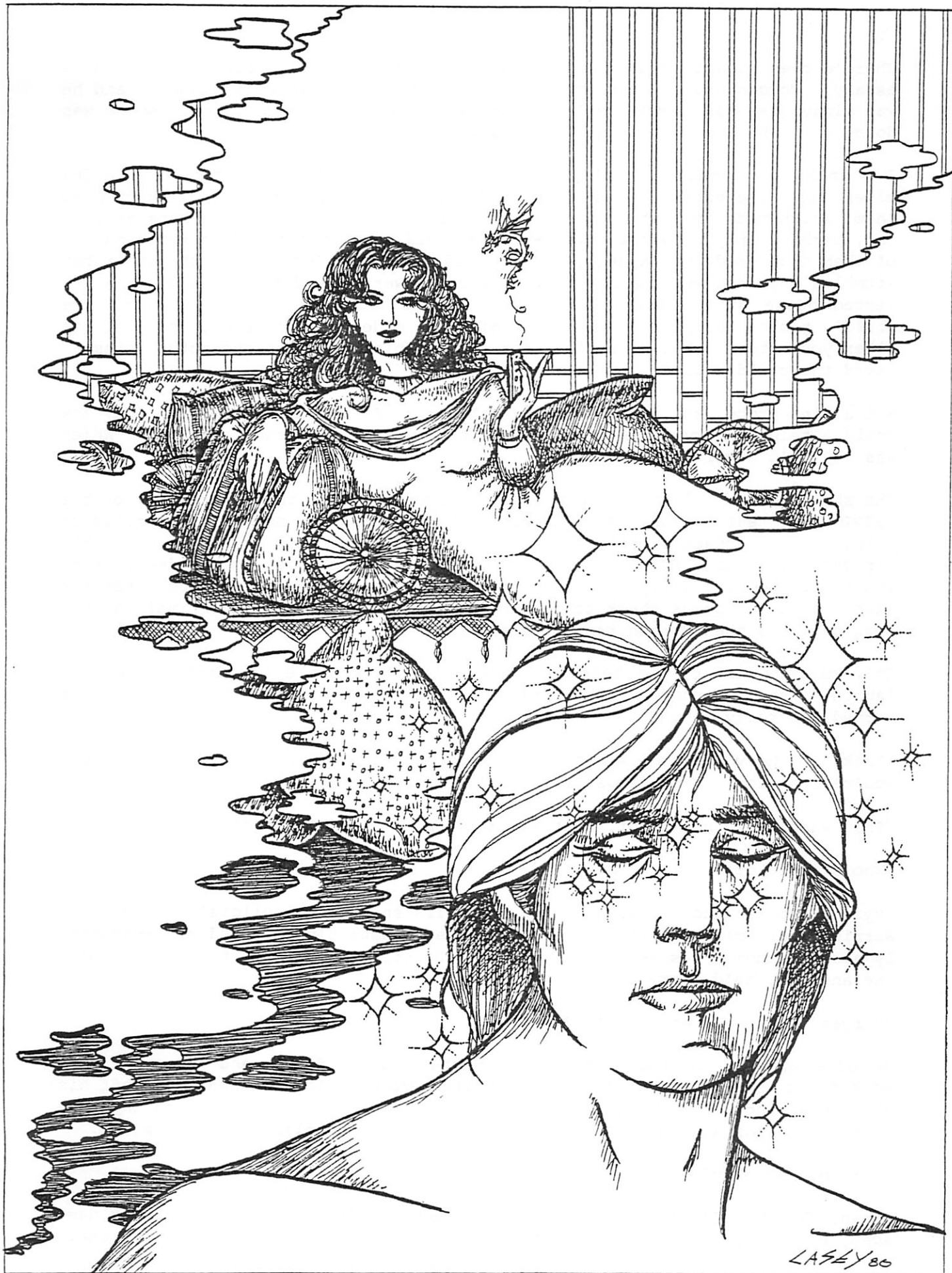
Morgan knew differently. They were friends, and although Diana, too, kept her past to herself, she did confide in him at times. He knew she was an orphan, raised by a prominent Caprican family. And he knew she loved another Warrior, an officer aboard the GALACTICA.

"I know he's still alive," she told him once. "Somehow, we're bound to each other. I don't know how to explain it. But if anything ever happened to him, I'd know..."

Morgan understood. With another sigh, he leaned his head against the support of one of the dome's tylinium panels, closing his eyes once more. And, not for the first time, he found himself wishing he didn't care quite so much about the attractive red-haired captain. Unfortunately, though, he'd been in love with her almost since the first time they'd met.

He knew she liked him, was fond of him. But Diana was always quite honest about her feelings toward him -- and she didn't love him. They spent a lot of off-duty time together, but always as friends, never as lovers.

Morgan knew that some day their relationship might change. He could change it -- but the very idea of tampering with someone else's thoughts and emotions appalled him. He knew how he'd feel if someone tried to do it to him; it was hard enough to bring himself to probe another's mind when circumstances required it.



There'd been occasions in the past when such a telepathic probe had been necessary; Morgan usually resorted to it only when lives were in danger, and he was always careful never to let anyone know what he was doing or how he was doing it. He remembered one time, yahrens ago...

Two small boys had been playing together in a heavily forested area a few miles from the outskirts of Caprica City. The area had been forbidden to them, which made it that much more attractive. Something -- perhaps an animal, perhaps only a forest noise -- frightened them; the children ran, and one of them blundered into a deep, steep-sided ravine. Terrified, the other boy stumbled on, and eventually was discovered cowering under a tree near a deserted house just outside the city. Morgan had been nearby; sensing the child's panic, he probed the young mind in order to backtrack, to find the other youngster. His "hunch" -- for so he explained it to the authorities -- saved the child's life.

But a mind probe for personal gain? Never. It was unthinkable. Only how could a telepath convince a non-telepath he wouldn't do such a thing? Which was why he'd never let anyone know...

The shrilling of alarms brought Morgan abruptly back to the reality of the OSIRIS, the Destruction, the Cylons. He didn't probe; not even conscious of doing it, he sensed superficial thoughts aboard the ship and learned of the approach of a large Cylon task force. He closed his eyes, took a deep, calming breath -- and teleported himself to a momentarily empty corridor near the launch bay. A quick check to be sure his somewhat unorthodox arrival had not been noticed, then Morgan ran for his ship.

Only microns later, he heard Diana's voice. "Purple Squadron, ready to launch," she reported to the bridge. Then the Vipers were in space, wings formed and ready to meet the attack.

"Frak!" The voice was Arion's. "Lavanna, for Sagan's sake, watch where you're shooting! You almost fried me!"

"That wasn't me, you idiot, that was a Cylon -- and I got him!"

"Who's an idiot...?"

Typical, Morgan thought with a grin as he listened to the pilots' banter. The Warriors were close, like a family, and they constantly bickered good-naturedly amongst themselves -- even as they fought off Cylons. If they didn't bait one another, he'd worry...

"Morgan! Two -- on your tail!"

He dove sharply to the left, evading the Cylons' fire, and the near miss rocked his small ship. Then one of the Cylon craft exploded just off his starboard wing, and Morgan's Viper bucked violently as a metal fragment tore into one of the engines. The engine sputtered, then flared to life again.

"Morgan, you okay?"

"Yeah, Selket, I'm fine," he told the Green Squadron pilot. "Engine's damaged, but not enough to take me out. Thanks for the assist. I owe you one."

"Any time," the other pilot replied as her ship veered off.

The battle raged for centars, it seemed, with the Cylons -- as usual -- getting the worst of it. Once, Morgan saw Diana's Viper under heavy attack, but she escaped before he could go to her aid. Then the few remaining Cylons were running.

"Break off. Repeat -- break off. Do not pursue."

The somewhat ragged defenders headed back to the OSIRIS; virtually all of them had sustained some damage, and the weary pilots were quite willing to let the surviving Cylons go. Morgan realised his starboard engine was sputtering again -- in fact, it had done so throughout the battle, but he'd been far too busy to notice. Now, it presented a serious problem.

For any other pilot, that is. Morgan wasn't too concerned. As a telekineticist, he could control matter to some degree, certainly enough to keep the engine intact and functioning until he could land. He worked on it, nudging pieces back into place with his mind, and was almost ready to start his approach when he spotted Diana's ship.

The squadron commander's Viper was in worse shape than his own. Apparently one of the Cylons had gotten lucky. Morgan examined the small fighter with his mind as well as his eyes. It was impossible to be sure of the extent of the damage, but it looked, at a guess, like the stabilisers were completely gone, their control cables severed. Diana wouldn't even know, not until she actually tried to land. And even an attempted landing would probably prove fatal, since it would be impossible to hold the ship level.

There was no way he could tell her, either. The external damage wasn't too serious, and there was no way anyone could know the rest. But he had to warn her -- somehow.

"Diana? Are you all right?"

"I'm fine, Morgan, not even a scratch. My ship's a bit mangled, but it probably looks a lot worse than it is. My instruments don't tell me anything, though. What's it look like?"

"Some stabiliser damage," he answered, taking his ship under hers for a quick visual examination. "I can't tell how bad from here, but there's a chance the lines are broken. Can you control it?"

"Sure, easily. It's perfectly steady, no problems so far. Now, would you please land that excuse of a fighter of yours, so I can get in?"

So far... Lords, there wasn't much he could do -- unless he could get her ship down before his, try to control it as he controlled his own. "Anything you say, Captain, but I'd rather wait for you." He kept his tone light. "You know, ladies first."

"Since when?" Diana replied with a laugh. "Besides, Lieutenant, you..." She broke off abruptly, responding to a transmission from the OSIRIS. Then Morgan heard her answer, "All right, Control, on my way." The damaged Viper altered course, heading for the far side of the battlestar. "Morgan, the port bay's

all yours. I get starboard this time. I guess we'll resolve the argument by landing together. Ready?"

"All set."

But Morgan's attention was not on his landing, or on his ship. Instead, he worked on Diana's Viper, his mind forcing control cables back together, holding them in place until she was safely down. It took all his skill, all his power -- the damage was far more extensive than he'd thought. Later, the ground crew might wonder just how she'd managed to land without crashing -- but they'd never know the truth.

Unfortunately, Morgan was too busy to concentrate on his own Viper. He had to give his full attention to Diana's landing, relinquishing control of the bits and pieces of his fighter's damaged engine. Those pieces began to shift; the starboard engine quit completely just as Morgan entered the landing bay, and the wing dipped, grazing the deck. In open space, the ship would simply have tumbled, unharmed and in no danger, for a couple of microns until he could bring her back under control. In the bay, however...

Morgan didn't even have time to realise he was going to crash.

Engineers and med techs swarmed over the broken Viper, spraying fire-retardant foam and eventually prying the jammed canopy open. The unconscious pilot was carefully lifted from the wreckage and rushed to Life Centre, where a careful examination revealed no apparently serious injuries. The medical officer on duty ordered Morgan kept for observation, then allowed his worried squadron commander in to see him.

"He should be all right," Dr. Volans told her. "But we'll just have to wait and see."

* * * * *

Centars later, Morgan finally opened his eyes, not really sure he wanted to find out if he was still alive. He was badly bruised, but nothing seemed to be broken -- he'd been incredibly lucky. Stupid, too, to have been so careless. He wondered what kind of shape his Viper was in. Then his eyes focussed on the room, the people around him.

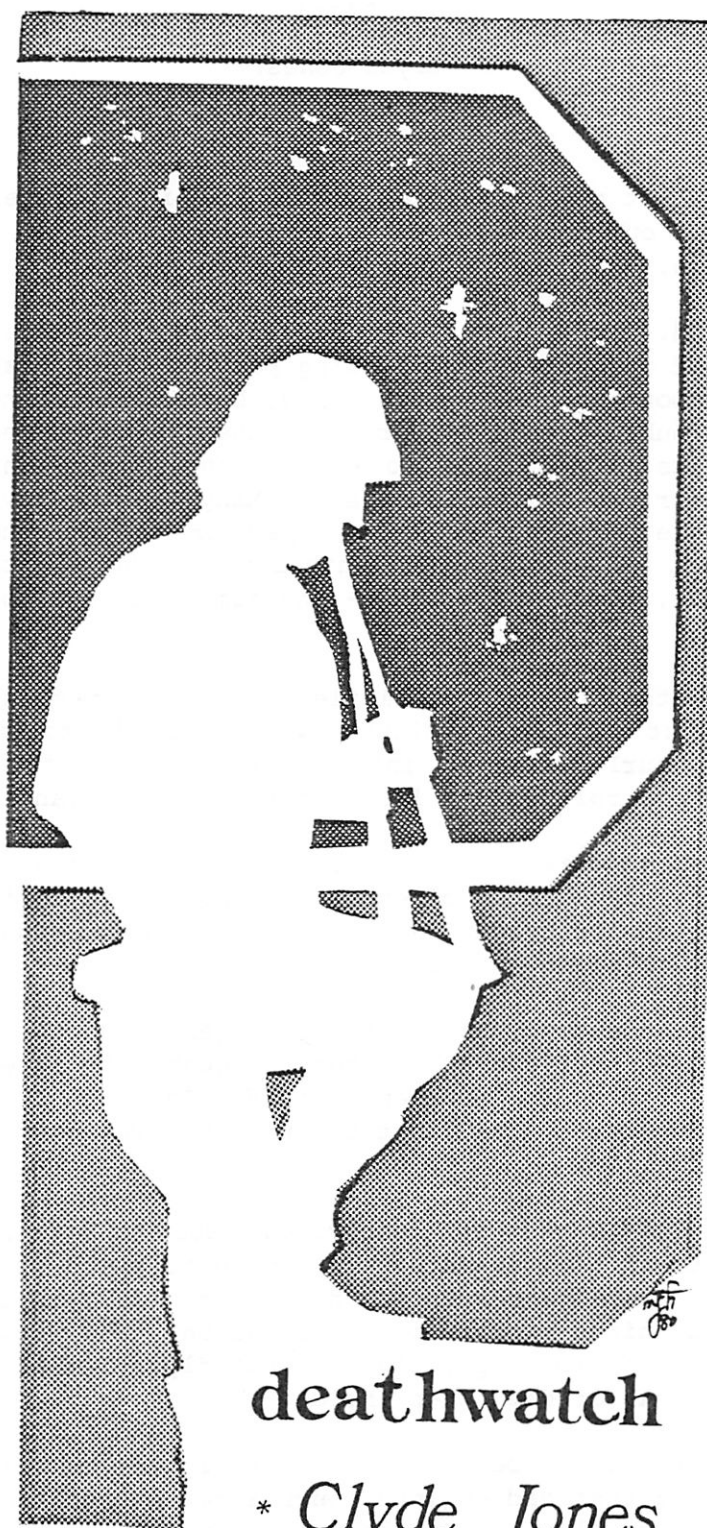
The first thing he saw was a pair of green eyes, surrounded by the pale blur of a face framed with red hair. The eyes were bright with unshed tears.

He whispered her name. "Diana..."

"Oh, Morgan! Thank all the Lords..." Then she was in his arms, crying in relief -- and he lay very still, stunned by a sudden realisation Diana herself probably didn't know. Not yet.

She loved him. She might still -- might always -- love that other Warrior, that man from her past. But she loved him, too.

It was enough.



deathwatch

* *Clyde Jones*

"Deathwatch"

(By Clyde Jones)

Deathwatch, we call it now. Keeping vigil here in the emergency bay of the OSIRIS. We wait for our men and women out on their patrols. We wait for them to return, or to die.

It used to be called, among ourselves, at least, the lifewatch. We would monitor the progress of our scouts and landing parties, keep track of the science parties pottering about on some remote world, hover like mother kren about one of our people in trouble, ready to spring to the overgrown med/emergency shuttle behind us in its little niche to extract one of our own from danger, or the results of their own overzealousness. Many was the day we came back to our space-bourne home dangling a dented Viper or shepherding an ailing tech shuttle. But, then, we were always lighthearted. We were the keepers of the safety of our people, those who would -- and almost always could -- bring them home safe.

Now, we're a deathwatch. We can do little during an armed engagement with our heartless enemies but sit here, tightly wound, ready to scavenge space for mangled remains or hurl ourselves into the landing bay to extract a Warrior from his crushed Viper following a less-than-successful landing attempt.

Rarely, today, do we venture into space for a rescue. Occasionally, we find a dying remnant of the great fleet of exodus. Then we go forth to examine the vessel, keeping watch for Cylon traps, hoping for life, usually finding only death. Dreary way to spend a tour.

Today, I sit in the emergency room, tootling gently on the pipes that are my special calling. Me? Officially, Gunnery Sergeant 1st Jones. According to the ship's records, I'm on the armaments staff. In fact, I spend my time here during conflicts and alerts, and most of my other waking time puttering with the engines or in the zoo.

I got on board the OSIRIS for its long voyage due to both supreme skill as a fast talker and a touch of blackmail. I wanted to space again -- any way I could. Stealing a deep-space ship was next on my list, if I didn't land this berth. Why? Why do birds migrate in their season? Why will a kor-eagle kill itself trying to escape from captivity? I must fly. I must search the stars, see new worlds -- that or die, deep inside.

I used to have a very secure berth on a combat lighter as first or second pilot. I flew anything that had engines, and a few atrocities that didn't. I would have continued to fly, if I hadn't been in the wrong place at the wrong time and taken a splinter of hull metal in one eye. At the time, I was only second pilot, and I should have frozen the area for later treatment, and gone into suspension until that treatment. Unfortunately, the splinter came from the wall of the control blister during a red-eye attack. It was part of the plate that sliced the first pilot in half. Someone had to fly us out of that

trap, and I was elected by fate. I got through by anesthetisation of the area, brilliant flying, and staunch refusal to think what flying with a barb in my eye would do to it. Also, of course, systemic shock. After treatment by a front-area medical facility, I received two things. One: a globe and cluster for bravery above and beyond, etc. Two: involuntary discharge. Even at full pay, that discharge hurt. With one eye, I could kiss piloting good-bye, except for sport flying. Blechhh.

So, I faked it. I memorised all the opthamalogical charts, signed up for planetary defence squadron, and eased my way in as -- gunnery sergeant? Better than nothing. At least I got to fly in the ships. Occasionally, I even got to handle the controls, with crews I knew well. Then the OSIRIS mission came up, and one Council member got indiscreet at my cousin's hostel. Happy coincidence, that -- having a tape running just in time to catch the great man make a fool of himself. I modestly traded him the tape -- and the six copies I made -- for a berth on the ship. Needless to say, he got the last copy long after I was in space.

Now I sit in the emergency room, ready to scrape my fellow Warriors off the deck plating.

"Jones, play something a bit more cheery, huh?" That was Mason, the watch commander.

"Sure, Mase. 'Highland Hymn' be okay?" He always liked that one. He agreed. I began nursing the double pipe and wailing in the odd tones of his home and mine. I know some people get the creeps at that, but we like it. Then again, the pipes are my heritage. Nowadays, no one much remembers the Pipers of the Night, the hedge wizards who use their double pipes to augment their magics. I remembered. I trained in their use, just as my Grammer insisted I train in the old cures and curses. Sonics. Hypnotic routines. And something else.

I played for the healing and eased the dying. Many were the Warriors who heard the soft hymns of healing and the tone poems of integration, vaguely through the layers of pain and hurt. I seemed to show up in Life Centre at critical points, and even the most skeptical medics accepted the way pain melted and healing seemed to renew as the pipes were played. Sonics and the cells' infrastructure? Magics and the spirits of the healers who went before? Your guess. I frankly don't know. I've seen too many men and Warriors twisting in agony, who suddenly seemed to feel ease and slip into rest at the touch of a melody. I've seen the painfully dying lose their fear and walk gently into their meeting with the Forebearers. I and others have seen. But we don't talk about it much. We, who believe, believe without dogma and self-pomp. Those who disbelieve at least keep a respectful silence.

That silence may stem more from the Sleep Viper who lives in the case for the old large ceremonial pipe set. He and I get along famously, though his touch is lethe and his bite death. I like to have him in the pipe case, replacing the ancient pipes that had to be smelted down for the vitally needed trace elements and earths needed by the hydroponics section a yahren ago. They were always the Pipes of Life, and life they now support. I have my little pipes, and my Viper. Who needs more?

"ENGAGEMENT ENDED. SHIPS COMING IN. NO MAJOR DEBRIS."

Well, those who died, died swiftly. No lingering amidst junk and fire. For that, we give thanks.

"What's their status?" That was Mason. "Anyone coming in hot?" Hot meaning either flaming or just hurt.

"NEGATIVE, EMERGENCY CONTROL. NO MAJOR DAMAGE. SOME SHOW HITS, BUT NOTHING TO PANIC OVER. WILL KEEP YOU INFORMED."

We kept our seats then, sat back and watched them coming in through the force curtain that keeps our air in and the ghosts of the void out. The port between us and the bay is thick, large, and slightly toasted from a near-hit we took one time from a misplaced Cylon. We had a good view as the ships slipped in, touched down -- some rather hard -- and were towed away. Then the last one came in. He wasn't watching his landing.

"MORGAN, PULL UP! MORGAN!"

He hit. His stabilisation system died in the penetration of the curtain, and he side-slipped. One stabiliser fin slashed a landing marker and then smashed into the deck plating. He was going fast enough that the fin cut -- briefly -- like a knife. When it stuck, the whole fin ripped loose, and the Viper body cartwheeled madly before the restraining fields caught it. He must have taken a 15-G shot then. We didn't notice. We were moving.

Sten grabbed the cutters and Mason the medikit. The fire team was already aiming their crash cart for the wreckage as we hurtled from the emergency bay, dripping report forms and the remains of Sten's lunch. True to form, I had my pipes in their belt pouch, and my crash kit.

Scrap. Scragged scrap. The thing reeked of fuel and lubricant. The energy pods were parted and warped and giving out miniature lightnings. The fire team was trying to sluice the thing down, but free energy was shorting out through the foam, nearly cooking them. Great. If the pilot was still alive, he might get the privilege of roasting to death when the fuel caught.

When desperate, cheat. My old motto.

I cheated there by calling an ancient chain-curse upon the lightnings, and I bid them be silent. So they were superstitious? Just luck that the pods ran dry then, of course. The lightnings lessened, and the team foamed the vessel down good.

Meanwhile, I hit the quick-release for the canopy and heard the charges go phuttt -- good clean detonation. And nothing moved. The canopy stayed down. I pulled out the #12 spanner from my kit and bashed the lock-section at the point of the canopy, the narrow front where it locks to the hull. I tried manually lifting, then. Still nothing.

"Look out, kids, I'm going to have to blow it!" I yelled for the benefit of the rest of the ground crew, and began squeezing blasting paste from the red and grey tube it likes to live in. Thin line at the joint of the comming here, globs over the lock tang points there, sliding into the mouth of the upper intake to glob the hinge attachment points, and ignite my jacket from the

heat of the dead engine. The fire team doused me as I stuck in the detonator beads, checked their positions, and locked their little box shut. They'd all go off when hit by the "trigger" signal if they weren't shielded. I checked the detonator box and noticed one more charge bead registering than I'd used. Frak! I found the little silvery thing on the floor, slung it into a remote corner of the bay, and yelled, "Detonating!" -- while hitting the deck.

When I hit the "go" button, it went. Nothing showy, just a flash of light, a prickly feeling from the transonic shock wave, and a clatter from the corner where the extra trigger bead had landed. Several lengths of pipe came crashing down from where they'd been stowed.

As the pipes were rattling their last protests, I was on my feet with the #12. When blowing a canopy, you do not use enough paste to do the job entirely -- if you do, you'll homogenise the pilot, no matter what his condition. You use just enough to shatter the lock and hinge.

I crawled up onto the Viper fuselage as the fire team sluiced us both down again, and let the lock have it with two hammer blows, one on either side of the canopy. I heard -- or felt -- the "chink" of shattering metal, then shoved the chisel end of the spanner under the comming and heaved.

And almost dived over the side of the Viper as the canopy flew open. While I struggled for balance, the med team rushed in with a life support table. As soon as I was able, I leaned into the smoky cockpit and pulled the restraining straps gently away from Morgan. I used my survival knife to slice down and away through the straps, then slid out of the way as the med techs teamed together to extract the body. Then we all hustled away toward Life Centre, me dragging my spanner. Happily, we were all far enough away from the ruins when the power pods flared once more, the fuel caught, and the ship went up in a geyser of fire.

For a moment, we just stood there, looking at each other.

"Good timing, Piper," from Mase.

"Yeah. Get that guy to a bed, huh?" I replied.

"We're going, we're going. Come on by later, and pipe for us, okay?"

"Right. And now, I think I'll shower and shake a bit. Sheesh..."

Near brushes with death get to me.

* * * * *

I don't know if Morgan heard my playing. I know the medics did, and they seemed relaxed by it. I know the Captain did when she came in to look over her...friend. There is a look of one who cares much for the life and welfare of another that shows like a gentle beacon to the Pipers. She had that look. I, not being entirely stupid -- no matter what others may say -- took my cue and departed.

So did the medics. I had to bend only one arm to get them to do it, too.

**SUZY
SPACECHIK
SEZ:**

HI! WHENEVER A MISSION OF INTER-GALACTIC
IMPORT BRINGS MY PET ATOM-APE **FUZZY**
AND MYSELF TO **YOUR** EVER EXCITING PLANET,
WE **ALWAYS** MAKE IT A POINT TO STOP AT:

THE NEW FANTASY SHOP

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THEY HAVE YOUR WORLD'S
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LATEST (AND OLDEST) IN **COMICBOOKS**
AND FANZINES AS WELL! NOT ONLY
IS IT A REAL **FUN** PLACE TO HANG OUT,
BUT I BOUGHT A TOY GALACTICA STUN
BLASTER THERE ONCE THAT SAVED MY
LIFE IN THE **SPAZ-WARS** AGAINST
THE **FUNGUS RUNNERS** OF **PHOTON-12!!**

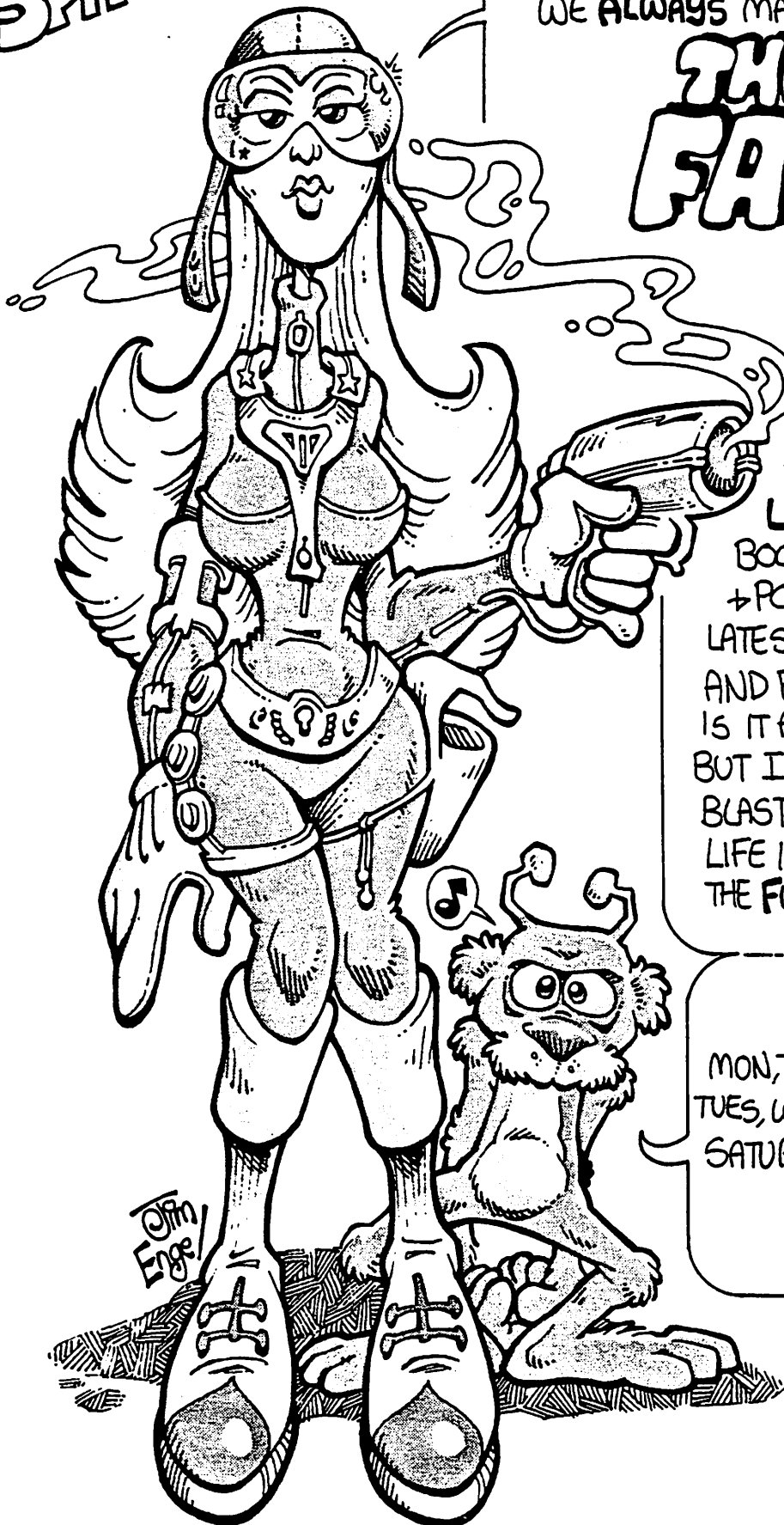
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MON, THURS, FRI. 12:00 NOON TO 8:00 P.M.
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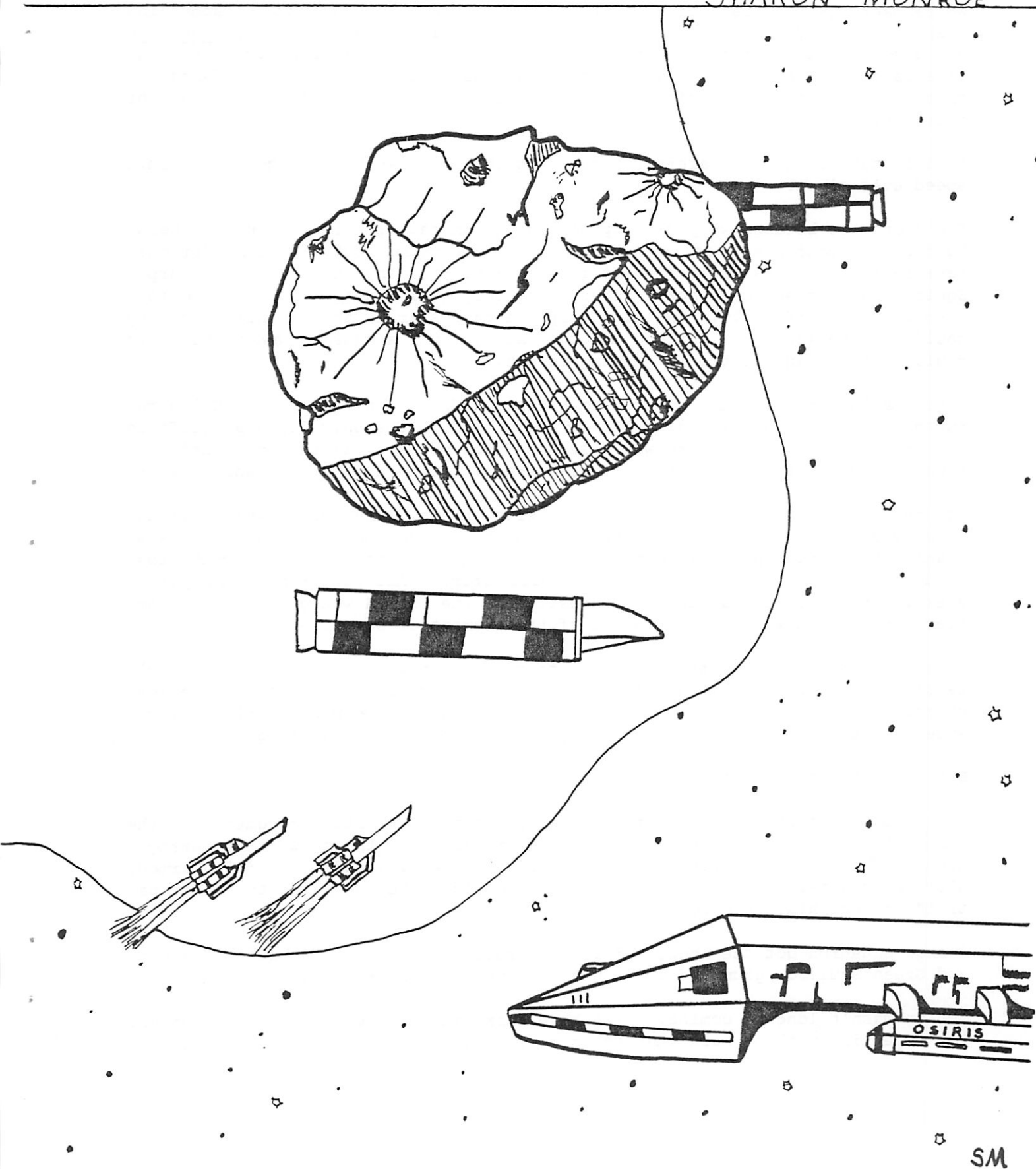
*** ASK GEORGE ABOUT FREE
CHAMELEON OFFER!!** EXPIRES
NOV. 27 1981

ART: ENGEL LETTERING: M. SMETKO



Through the Void

SHARON MONROE



ALEXANDRA'S DIARY: THROUGH THE VOID

We're back on the trail of the GALACTICA, and we've managed to do something sneaky to the Cylons, too. Everyone on this battlestar -- and I mean everyone -- is so elated about the events of the last section, we'd probably just laugh if a base star was foolish enough to attack us. I myself feel so fantastic that if I don't do something soon, I'm going to launch myself right out of this chair.

It all started with an alert several days ago, and we've been going at full speed ever since.

The alert was because we picked up several Cylon patrol ships on our scanners. We'd been camouflaged, following the trail of a comet, but the Commander must have felt the Cylons would find us in a fly-by. At any rate, it gave Purple Squadron an excuse to attack. There were only half a dozen ships, so we took them with no difficulty. We didn't spot a base star in the vicinity, so they couldn't have seen us, but one of the Raiders got a message away before we could throw up an electronic jamming screen.

Major Layla's people had no problem breaking the Cylon code. The Cylon reported unidentified Colonial craft of some kind. The only Colonial craft in the area was us. Then there was a second Cylon message, asking for clarification and identification of the Colonial craft. They didn't know who we were.

Colonel Lyra brought us the news, along with orders. The Cylons were obviously unaware of who was hiding where, and we knew where their base star was, thanks to pinpointing their communications beam. A battlestar has more than enough power to take out one measly base star. All squadrons were put on alert. If the base star came to investigate, the OSIRIS would set up a scrambler screen, and we'd make good use of the element of surprise.

In short, if we were spotted, we were to take out the Cylons before they could report back on our location and/or existence. We couldn't risk that. We were skirting a strange magnetic void, and we wouldn't have had any place to run except into it. Of course, as it is, that's where we wanted to go...

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

The Cylons sent in another patrol, expecting some lost little fragment of the GALACTICA's fleet. They expected no problem capturing the crew for interrogation. What a joy it would be to surprise those tin-heads! A fully armed, alert battlestar is about as far from "some old skybus delaying the first patrol" as Colonials can be!

Orange Squadron got the honour of that patrol. The rest of us waited, alert, and Green Squadron grumbled about not getting their share of the action.

Action wasn't long in coming. The base star came to investigate, suspicious, but expecting nothing more than token resistance. All squadrons launched, and

we hit those Cylons with everything we had before they knew what was happening. They never got a message off. OSIRIS missiles hit from one side, while we took care of their Raiders and harried them from the other side. We were successful.

When that ship went up in flames and shrapnel, I'd swear you could've heard us from here to Caprica! If the scrambler screen hadn't been up, every passing ship would've thought they'd found a ship full of demented idiots.

That base star had no idea of what it was looking for, or it would've been more cautious. Everything seems to point to one thing -- the Cylons don't know the OSIRIS exists! This could be a great advantage for us. They don't know we exist, and they certainly don't know our strength or our location, and Commander Christopher is certainly making good use of this.

We followed the path the Cylons must've taken, skirting the edge of that eternal void. That void had us on edge for days. We didn't know where the GALACTICA had gone from here, but the Commander decided the Cylons would know if anyone did.

So we rested for the day we followed the Cylon trail, refueling and rearming our ships, coming down from the adrenalin peak that kept us going during the battle. We picked up Cylon signals all the way -- first a call to the destroyed base star, getting more frantic with every centon; then a hasty call to some base. They were worried. It looked like that base star was the only one protecting some installation.

As we approached that installation, our Vipers were ready for launch for the third time in two days. They hailed us once, must've thought -- or hoped -- we were friendly. It wasn't much of an installation -- a small, lonely asteroid, two tankers, and a freighter. The system was right at the edge of the void.

After destroying the freighter and its small defensive complement, the Commander "requested" (hah!) that we be careful of the tankers, taking them intact if we could, but not taking any undue risks. We could use the fuel.

Orange Squadron carried out half that order. Green Squadron carried out the other half. There wasn't much the Cylons could do about it. The asteroid had no defensive weapons capable of giving us any trouble. We got both tankers.

Purple Squadron was supposed to be doing recon flights while this was happening. When we regrouped, we thought we'd lost some people -- Captain Diana (a great loss), Sergeant Arion (no loss), and Lieutenant Morgan (the strange one).

A few centons later, our Captain's cheerful voice was inviting us down to the asteroid. During the melee, our missing pilots, along with Baleron and Corbin of Orange Squadron, had taken the base.

I've had some experience with Cylon scanners and surveillance tools, so I was put right to work. We pulled some very useful information out of their computer network. The Cylons were unaware of us, and completely unprepared for a battlestar (eek!) sneaking up behind them. More importantly, the GALACTICA

had passed this way -- through the magnetic sea.

This had been a problem for the Cylons. The magnetic void completely disrupted them. They couldn't navigate or function well in its vicinity, yet they had to track our sister ship and her fleet. Therefore, they'd set up a whole series of beacons and probes, leading in a more or less straight line across the void, and monitored them from this asteroid installation. Thus, they could traverse the void, keeping a constant fix on each beacon as they passed it. Without the beacons... Well, it would take them some time to re-establish communications and supply lines through this area.

The same thought must've occurred to Commander Christopher. As Diana reported our findings, a slow smile crossed his face. And, for the fourth time in two days, our pilots were all back in the ready room, with our Vipers fresh for launch.

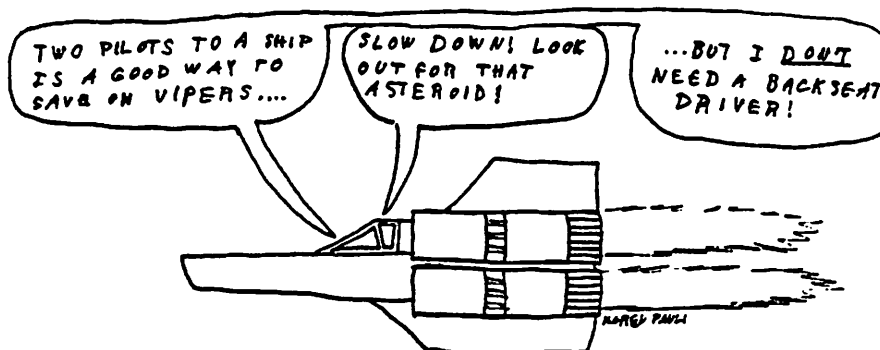
After destroying the surveillance asteroid as a final salute to our enemy, we headed into the void, using the same frequencies the Cylons used to follow their beacons. As we passed each, a Viper patrol was sent out to destroy it. Our six-ship patrols had orders to keep a fix on our group leaders, while they kept a fix on the OSIRIS. We didn't want to lose anybody.

Somewhere near the end of the void, the Commander tightened our patrols -- fast and few communiques between ships, no more double-fix patrols, and closer attention to the Cylon frequencies. We also tried to make more use of our scanners. In case we encountered a Cylon task force at the end of the void, the Commander wanted to keep all our options open, without having to worry about losing pilots who were temporarily out of touch.

The Cylons must've been sure of their companions behind the void. We left the magnetic sea and vanished into the star field without encountering any more patrols.

With the information the computers recovered from the Cylons, we had an idea of where to start looking for the GALACTICA. We were hunting for a lone star with a single planet, a star that pulsed like a natural beacon against the void.

The Commander seems to know something we don't. He seems to know exactly where to send our patrols, what to look for. I guess a strong... Intuition? Psychic sense? Something, anyway, must be necessary to a commander...



PERSONAL LOG - FLIGHT SERGEANT MARA

Greetings to...

I just can't get over feeling like I'm taping a letter home every time I make an entry in this journal. Well, since the OSIRIS is my home now, maybe I am. I could never talk to myself or to a machine, so I have to feel like I'm telling this to another person. So in my own mind, I'm talking to Mother, or to my brother Davos.

It's strange, but even though I lost my entire family one at a time to the Cylons, it all seems more like a bad dream than reality. I have to keep reminding myself that I won't be going home after this tour of duty. This is my home, for the rest of my life, probably. But if that realisation ever does sink in, I'll probably go to pieces, so maybe it's just as well it doesn't. It allows me to keep functioning.

Everybody seems to have different reactions to the destruction of the Colonies, I've noticed. Many of the survivors we picked up were in shock, or didn't know where they were. Some still don't. I'm told that when we found Arion, he thought he was back at his old battlestar with his wingman, who was killed. He's all right now, except that he goes after Cylons with a vengeance I've never seen in anyone else.

The pilots already on the OSIRIS don't seem to have been hit as hard -- except Ariella, maybe. She's latched onto the other pilots like a substitute family. I got careless one day and almost got hit by a Cylon. She came to my rescue, and then when we landed she tore into me and really gave me frak for nearly getting myself killed! And she's not even my commander! Then the other day we lost a pilot, and when she heard about it, she just fell apart. We finally had to send for a med tech. I'm told it's not the first time that's happened.

Corbin doesn't seem to have been affected, but if you watch long enough, you notice he's always smiling and joking. It's like a wall he's built around himself, like he's afraid that if he stops smiling, reality will sink in and he'll start to cry.

There are also a lot of people who are pinning all their hopes on finding the GALACTICA. I don't know what they'll do if we don't. Even our normally cool Captain Diana sometimes gets this rather wistful look when the GALACTICA is mentioned. She thinks no one's noticed, but I've caught it a couple of times.

There's a lot of fooling around and practical jokes on the ship, but most of it's to help us forget our losses and to cover the fear that maybe we're the last of the human race. Sometimes I wonder if the GALACTICA isn't just a myth we created because we want to believe there's someone else out there.

The more I dwell on this, the more depressed I get. I started this log entry to get out of a depression, not to go deeper! I've got to get off this sub-



ject!

Let's see. Someone tried to get a drill squad going, but I refused to lead it, and the idea died. We had a birthday party for one of the pilots last section, someone I don't know yet...

What else? Oh, Pandora's Perpetual Pyramid Game is still going. Our squadron's triad team lost the intraship tournament. Draco got lost in the engine room yesterday...

Battle alert! Gotta go...

DISCOVERY

on

KOBOL

SHARON MONROE



ALEXANDRA'S DIARY: DISCOVERY ON KOBOL

Commander Christopher knew just where to search for our original homeworld. Purple Squadron had the watch as we entered the star system, though all squadrons were at the ready, as we've been for days. We were on double patrols, for security. Lyra, Diana, Arion, and I were up at the time.

Somehow, Arion got ahead of his flight leader, so he spotted the planet before the rest of us did. He reported its location, sounding very excited, then said he was going in for a landing. One Viper going in alone on a strange planet is not good strategy. Diana told him so as she followed him down, cursing all the way. I've never heard such language from our cool and collected Captain before.

So what did Lyra and I do? Lyra sent in our confirming report, called for further Viper patrols, did a quick fly-by of the backside of the planet to make sure there were no Cylons waiting, then followed the Captain. I was behind the Colonel all the way.

Kobol, that mystical, mythical planet where our species evolved. I'm not sure what I expected to find on that dead world. It's hard to believe those massive ruins and tall pyramids once contained a flourishing, starfaring civilisation on a green and verdant world. Now it's dead, dry -- and still its compelling spirit speaks to us. Even abandoned, Kobol is beautiful. I felt small and insignificant there. Flying over the ruins of my ancestors, the magnificent birthplace of our civilisation, I felt overwhelmed. I almost expected to find some elaborate message for us from our past, perhaps a revelation as to where the GALACTICA and the rest of our people had gone. But it was all so still...

Diana was lecturing Arion when we reached them, but her temper cooled quickly in the presence of the Colonel. After all, Diana had landed, too.

It was only centons before another patrol flew over us, wings dipping in salute and acknowledgment of location. Close behind them were two shuttles of civilian survey technicians, all eager to take this planet apart dust molecule by dust molecule, and take it back to the OSIRIS. Military members of the survey teams had to wait until a patrol roster was set up.

Cultural and geosurvey teams were really in their element. As part of the cultural survey team, I have to admit it was probably the most moving experience in my life to date. There's a difference between objective study of an alien culture and an awe-struck "don't touch" examination of your own origins.

What hurt the most, I think, after I got over my tiptoeing tendency and my irrational feeling that somebody was standing behind me, was the realisation of how much damage the Cylons had done here. Laser burns through priceless wall mosaics, strafing runs through paved streets that had lasted over six thousand yahrens, missile-blasted holes through pyramids, melted walls, carved landscapes. There was nothing alive on Kobol. Why had the Cylons seen fit to

bombard a dead planet? My hands were clenched and I was swallowing tears again when Sept called to me from just around a nearby pyramid.

I remember hating the Cylons with as great an intensity as when they'd killed my parents. It's bad enough to destroy a living, viable culture and people. Indeed, it's inexcusable. But there's something pathetic in destroying the past of that culture. Wasn't it enough the Cylons had driven our few survivors from our homes? Did they fear our ghosts as well?

Then I saw why the Cylons had blasted a dead world. Beyond the pyramid were the remains of a Colonial Warrior encampment. There were a number of torn tents, lots of scattered and blasted containers, a spot of some dried brownish stuff we didn't have to analyse, and the typical scorch marks that proclaim, "a ship took off from here," instead of from a launch bay.

The GALACTICA had been here. Had she left intact? Had she been setting up a base, or merely a temporary camp while they studied this world? How many died here, on the ground and in the air? Some obviously escaped, and the evidence proclaimed a rapid evacuation.

One item, in particular, seems to have a lot of significance, at least to Captain Diana. I found it, but it was really Arion's fault.

He was also in the old encampment, not far from me. "Hey, Aley," he said, "you look like something's bothering you."

Now, I've heard a lot of short forms and nicknames for Alexandra, but the one I hate most is "Aley." Arion knows this. He uses it at every opportunity, purely to annoy me. Hence, we do not really get along that well. A bit of rivalry, a little spite, some one-up-manship. We'll get along fine when he grows up. He's one of the survivors we picked up when we got back from our long mission.

He's luckier than most people deserve.

Anyway, I was suffering from mood changes Arion couldn't have anticipated. I had no intention of displaying my emotions in front of him, so I snapped some obscenity and stalked off. I don't know if Arion had some retort in mind or if he thought he'd finally said too much, but he followed me. So did Diana, who'd probably heard my outburst.

I didn't want to be banished from Kobol! Seeing them both, I ducked into that slightly damaged pyramid next to the camp. Slightly? It looked like the pyramid had nearly fallen apart.

Among the stone-carved and inlaid walls, I found a modern relic. It was a helmet, the kind Viper pilots wear in action, and its markings were those of the GALACTICA. It bore the name "Apollo." Proof!

I remember an Apollo from the Academy. He was a few yahrens older than I, but he was one of those commanders' kids, so he knew Io, and he helped us out with some studying for a really major test that first yahren. His father commanded the GALACTICA, if I remember right. He was gaining quite a reputation for himself, young as he still was, when we left on our mission.

He had dark hair and was very good-looking, and extremely intelligent. He had some interesting friends, too. He's the kind of man no woman wants to forget.

Apollo had survived this long. I wondered if he'd died here, or merely overlooked this helmet when he left. I guess we'll know for sure when we find the GALACTICA.

I spent some time remembering old and good times, staring at that helmet. When I found my way out again -- with very little difficulty, I might add -- Diana and Arion were about to call for a search party. The Captain thought I might be lost in the tomb.

My appearance assured them I wasn't lost. To forestall any possible reprimands, I handed the helmet to my superior. "Evidence," I said. "The GALACTICA was here."

She nodded, reaching for it. "Yes, I know. We found more traces just beyond the camp.

Then Diana took a look at the name on the helmet, gasped, and froze. She recovered in just a micron, though she still had a peculiar, well, strangeness in her eyes.

"Are you all right, Captain?" Arion asked.

She just nodded, silent for a micron. "Arion, I believe you can report back to your team," she finally said.

When she said no more, he moved away very slowly.

After another centon, Diana continued. "Make your report, Sergeant. Did you find...anything else, in there?"

"I didn't get far in," I said. "It's collapsed. But the helmet was all that was out of the ordinary. There were no bodies, if that's what you mean."

That must've been what she meant, because she seemed to relax a bit, become more like herself.

"Make your report to Lyra and Fornax," she said abruptly. "Then rejoin your team." She turned away -- but she kept the helmet.

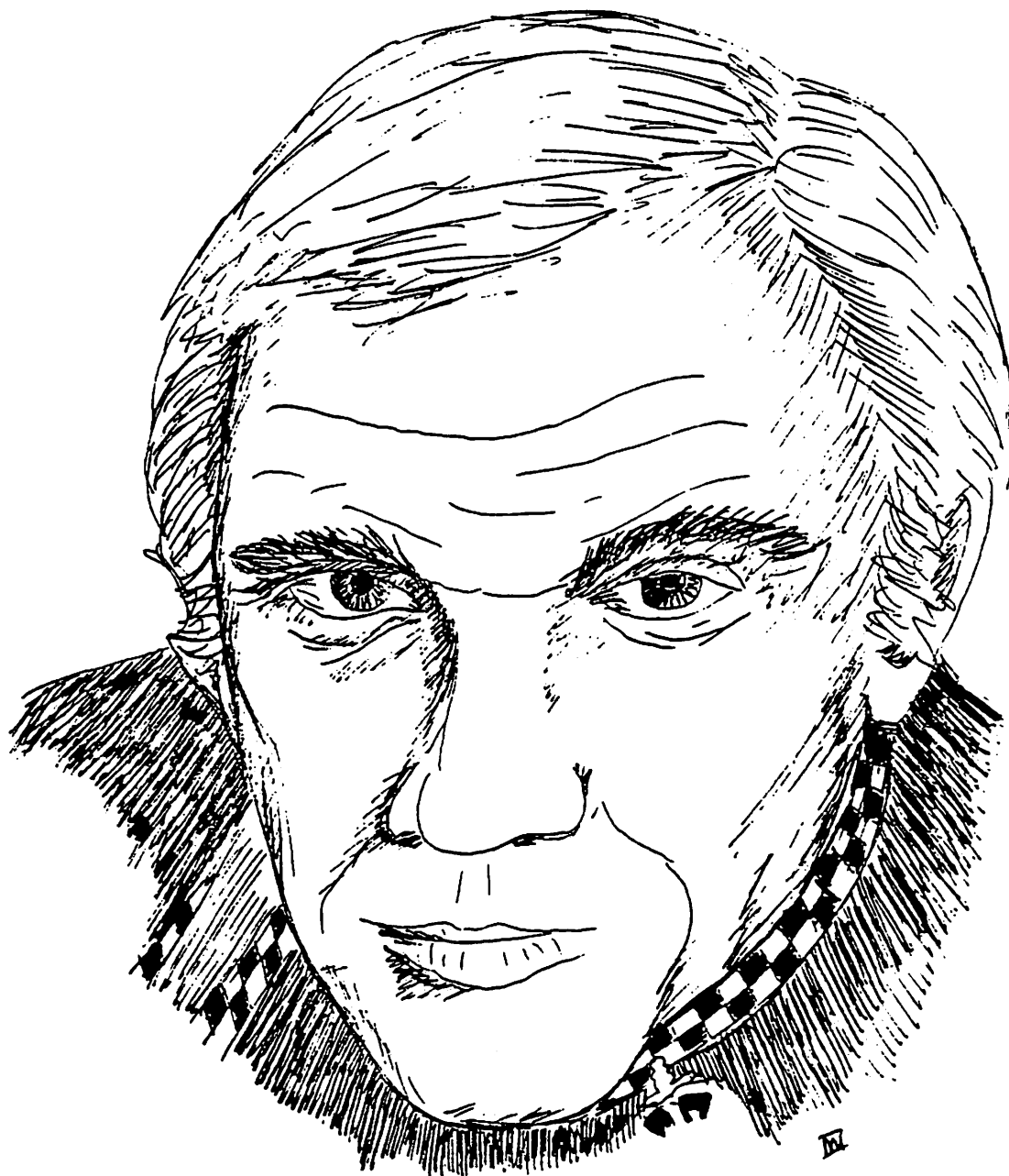
The next few days passed fairly rapidly. We were all busy with our survey teams, recon patrols, and regular ship duties. Then we got underway again. We also intercepted a Cylon signal, so we knew which way to go. We're still following the GALACTICA.

Captain Diana has been very distant since we found Apollo's helmet. That wouldn't be unusual in her, if not for that little find and her reaction to it. Also, I haven't seen the helmet since, and it didn't show up in Diana's report.

With everyone else so cheerful, it's hard to understand why Diana seems so upset. I wish I knew what was going on. The Captain's not easy to please when

she's in this mood. Maybe we could help if we knew what the problem is -- if there is a problem, that is. I'm sure it has something to do with this Apollo from the GALACTICA. If I dared do a little investigating...

What the frak! I'll try anything once!



"Baleron"

(By Bennett Snyder)

I was born twenty-six yahrens ago in an area of Caprica called Tranquilfern. It was such a beautiful place, one would hardly have known there was a war going on.

Jamaar, my father, wasn't born on Caprica. He originally came from Picon, but didn't want to spend too much time on any one world. He was a pilot aboard the ATLANTIA and met my mother Beershaba while on furlon. It was a case of love at first sight, as the saying goes. They were sealed three-quarters of a yahren later, and I came into the world just one yahren after that.

I don't know much about my father. His visits were infrequent, and it took a lot out of my mother to play both roles while he was gone. I think I had a childhood pretty much like anyone else's. It would have been a happier one if the damned Cylons had left my quiet home alone.

We had a small landing field behind our house, and one day my father was allowed to come home on furlon while the ATLANTIA was in orbit. I went out to meet him and saw his ship suddenly set upon by several Cylon fighters that had slipped through the planet's defence alert system. I was stunned when I saw the Viper explode. Then two Raiders quickly turned our home into an inferno and started a blaze in the nearby forest, frightening the animals into a stampede. I ran as fast as I could to get away from those single-eyed demons. It wasn't fair for a six-yahren-old to go through such a disaster. But that wasn't the end of it.

A Cylon began a strafing run in my direction. Suddenly it disappeared in a cloud of debris, and I waved frantically as a fighter from the GALACTICA flew overhead, dipping his wings to me.

The pilot had started to land when a teglet, a large orange-and-black striped bast-like predator, charged me. It had been burned by the fire and was in such pain that it was going to attack the first moving object it saw -- namely me. The GALACTICA pilot swiftly regained altitude and fired at the creature -- just a micron before it would have reached me. The teglet died instantly, and the pilot landed, picked me up, and took me to our capital city.

I've never forgotten that pilot, and I always visited him whenever possible. The last I knew, he was a colonel on the GALACTICA. When I first met him, though, he was a lieutenant -- Lieutenant Tigh.

When I was older, I signed up for the Academy, hoping to become a Warrior and avenge my family. While there, I met and fell in love with a beautiful girl named Athena, the daughter of Commander Adama. We dated often, and we shared several classes, including communications, which is now my speciality.

I never knew I had a possessive streak until Athena started falling under the

spell of an ensign named Starbuck, one of her older brother's friends. We had several arguments over our relationship and how Starbuck was affecting it. I wanted Athena and me to be sealed, but because of Starbuck, it began to look like that would never happen.

When I graduated, I volunteered to be part of the OSIRIS's crew. I bid farewell to my Aunt Salome, who'd taken care of me until I joined the Academy, and to Colonel Tigh and my other friends. Athena and Starbuck were the only people I had nothing to say to. I guess after losing the ones I loved most, I hated having to lose her as well. I had a lot of black thoughts about Starbuck -- a pompous lieutenant by then -- and hoped he'd get what I felt was his due.

Serving on the OSIRIS was sometimes eventful, sometimes boring. We discovered and charted many new star systems, as well as things of minor importance, and we were happy to be on our way home after four yahrens in deep space. Once we got there, though, that feeling quickly evaporated. We were just entering our home space when we were attacked by Cylons.

We fought back, and fought back hard. Being an exploration mission, we didn't have full Viper squadrons. The odds were definitely not on our side. Once, I switched over to the Cylon transmitting frequency, hoping to get an idea of what was going on, and heard one of the red-eyes make some brief comment about the Colonies having been destroyed.

My mind must have snapped at that point, for I suddenly saw my father's fighter blowing up and my home burning. I remembered my mother's dying screams as the house fell upon her. I must have changed frequencies again, for the rest of our pilots heard a scream of rage but didn't know who was doing all the shouting.

I foolishly attacked several Cylons alone, quickly getting myself caught in a pinwheel attack. A blast penetrated my cockpit, the heat of the beam resealing the damaged areas instantly. Captain Diana and another pilot came to my rescue, then escorted me back to the OSIRIS.

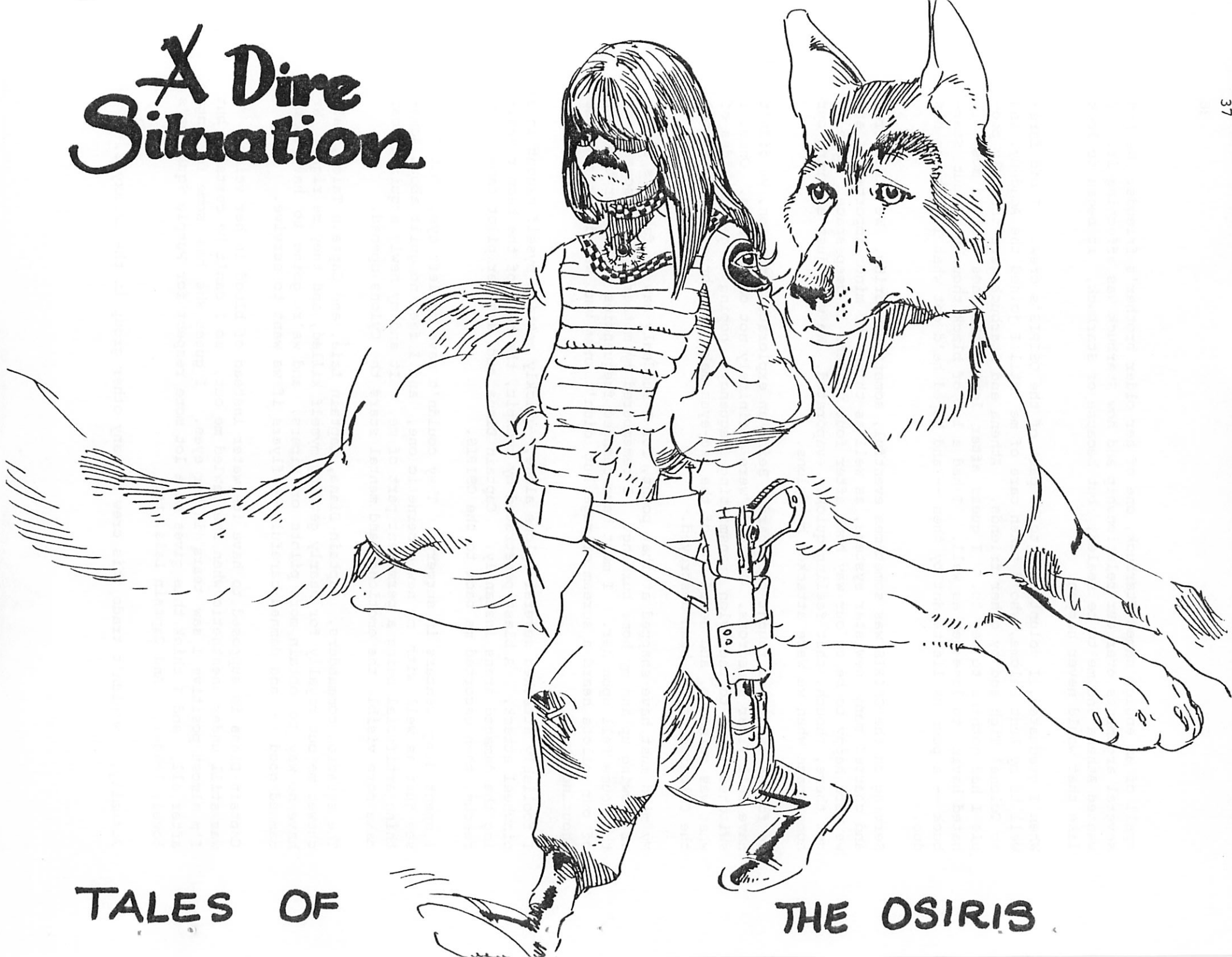
I spent long centars in surgery. They couldn't save my left eye, but I can see just as well with my new cybernetic one, and I feel no guilt about something artificial being a permanent part of me. It and my newly acquired scar make more visible the emotional and mental scars the Cylons opened.

The squadron commanders, Captain Diana, Captain Laia, and Captain Talos, all chewed me out royally for nearly getting myself killed, and they're right. We have no way to obtain more pilots or Vipers, and we're going to have to be damned good -- and damned careful -- flyers if we want to survive.

Captain Diana is supposed to have ice water instead of blood in her veins. I was still under anesthetic when she bawled me out, so I can't be certain, but I'm almost positive I saw tears in her eyes. I guess she has some feelings after all, and I think this gives me a lot more respect for Purple Squadron's lovely leader. And Captain Laia, too.

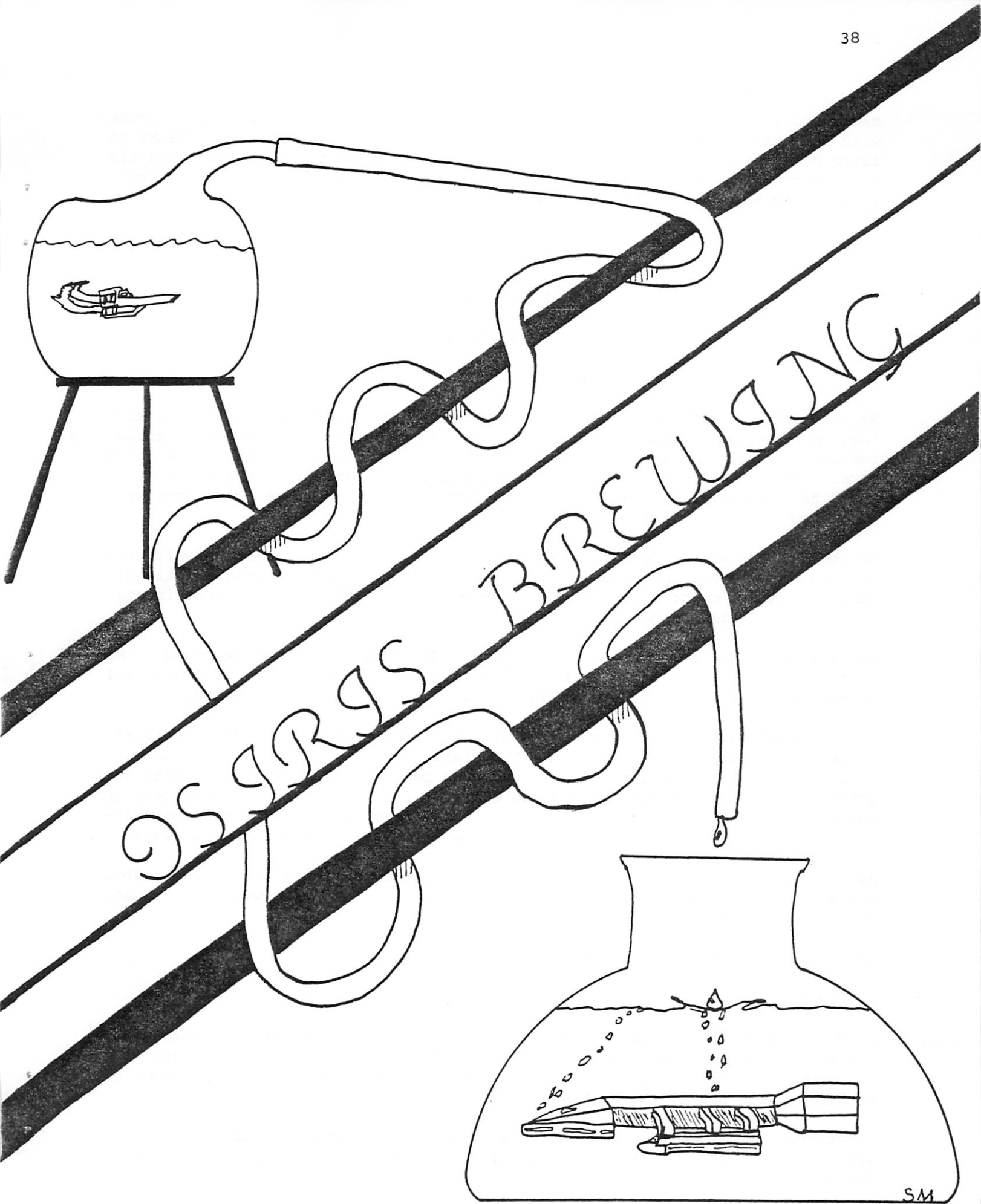
Actually, I wouldn't trade this crew for any other group in the galaxy...

A Dire Situation



TALES OF

THE OSIRIS



Many people have on occasion asked the name of that strange green brew drunk with such enjoyment by various members of the crew of the OSIRIS. Thanks to Larry Monroe, we are now able to tell you how it came to be. Larry and his wife Sharon make an incredibly talented writing team, and "Purple and Orange?" is proud to be able to present their stories to our readers. We hope to continue doing so for a long time to come...

"OSIRIS Brewing"

(By Larry Monroe)

Major Jason was extremely busy. He'd already spent most of a section arranging, rearranging, connecting, and fueling the peculiar combination of coils, containers, valves, and assorted paraphernalia that covered most of his quarters. When he wasn't operating the most unusual distilling device known to man, he was muttering over a peculiar formula he'd obtained from some very contented natives on a far-away planet.

He thought he was close to a breakthrough. The bright substance slowly collecting in the vat had a delicately enticing aroma that contrasted strongly with the awful concoctions that were the results of his first experiments. This time, he knew he had it right.

Jason decided he had to taste the results. The temptation was too great. He justified it with the logic that an alcoholic beverage had to be tested at all stages of its aging to determine when it was in peak form for drinking.

Jason dipped out a glass of the liquid. He peered at the transparent coloured fluid thoughtfully, swirling it in the glass, sniffing it, coming to the conclusion it would be delectable, perhaps even better than ambrosia! Jason had great faith in his abilities as a distiller. If he weren't Chief Engineer on the battlestar OSIRIS, he'd have become chief chemist on one of the small asteroids that produced the best booze in the Colonies. Or used to, anyway.

He took a sip of his creation, allowing the liquid to slowly work its way down his throat. It was still a bit harsh, he allowed, but aging would cure that. The liquor was delicious!

He decided to have another sip.

Then a third.

He dispensed with sips and gulped down the rest of the glass. Humming contentedly, he set several bottles of the collected alcohol aside to age. He was already considering what the optimum aging time would be, and what he should do with his creation.

He wanted to make more. The supplies of ale and ambrosia aboard the OSIRIS were quite depleted, and a new beverage would be welcome in the Officers' Club.

Obviously, he'd have to speak with Commander Christopher. The Commander liked a good drink as much as the next Warrior, and would probably okay production if it wasn't too great a drain on their somewhat limited resources. But Jason wasn't sure he wanted to turn production and distillation of this heavenly brew over to anyone else. Perhaps he should keep it a private installation...

He discovered the liquid in the vat had aged several centons, so he decided to taste it again. What should he call it?

He debated this for a few centons, finishing his second glass of green liquor. Perhaps inspiration would come with a third sample...

Not inspiration, but Lieutenant Hyperion, came with the third glass. There was a knock at the door, which was duly opened to reveal a bearded, red-blond man about the same size as Jason, but several yahrens younger. Both Hyperion and his wife Doria were among Jason's close friends.

Hyperion scanned the room before entering, to guarantee he wouldn't stumble over anything by mistake. With a chuckle, Jason offered him a glass of the heady stuff.

Hyperion stared. "It's green!"

"You're right. Try it."

Hyperion took a tentative sip, letting it burn its way to his stomach. A grin slowly crossed his strong features. "It's good!"

"Right again. Have some more."

"I think I will. What is it?"

"I'm not sure yet. Sit down and stay awhile."

Hyperion refilled his glass before settling in a corner. For the next few centons, the conversation centered on just where the Major had gotten the idea for this unnamed but certain to become well-known beverage.

It wasn't long before Captain Hannibal joined them. He was an older man, with curly grey hair and a rangy build. He'd been a Warrior in his youth, left the Service for a number of yahrens, and dropped out of sight. Finally, he resurfaced as an engineer, volunteering for and rejoining the Service specifically for this mission. He was something of a mystery.

He was also used to being the taster for Jason's brews. He accepted a glass without looking and downed the entire contents in one long swallow. His eyes bulged for a micron, then he peered into the vat.

"Hey, this stuff's green!"

"True. What do you think of it?" asked Jason.

"This is damn good, much better than most of what comes out of here. What do you call it? Or did you steal it somewhere?"

"It doesn't have a name yet. We were discussing that very subject when you walked in."

"I think I'll stay awhile, if this is what you're serving today."

Jason passed another round. The talk became more boisterous. Hyperion and Hannibal both forgot their original purpose in coming.

Commander Christopher didn't. It wasn't long before he came wandering by. He was looking for Captain Hannibal. Specifically, he wanted the report Hannibal had completed and was carrying with him. It had never quite reached the bridge.

"And what, may I ask, was more important than delivering that report?" The Commander tried to sound stern, but found it difficult in the face of three of his finest engineers grinning at him.

"Well, I didn't get there," the Captain responded.

"Commander, would you take a look at this, please?" Jason handed him a glass of some greenish fluid.

Christopher accepted the glass, glaring into its depths as if it should explain itself. "It's green. So what? What is it?"

The other three officers were laughing, trying to control their guffaws.

"Try it, Commander!"

"Oh, one of your concoctions, eh?" But the Commander took a sip to appease his engineers.

He looked up in astonishment. "Hey, this stuff isn't half bad!"

"We don't think so, either. This has been aging a full centar now, Commander. Why don't you join us in a taste of it?"

The Executive Officer could take care of the bridge. And the Commander was off duty, anyway. He decided to stay.

The booze began going down quite easily, smooth and tasty, slowly upsetting the balance of the four men. After a few more centars, one wouldn't have believed the bawdy tunes and confused stories the men were swapping. The Commander even agreed such a brew could be very useful in the Officers' Club -- but what was it?

They still couldn't decide on a name, and their suggestions were rapidly getting wilder and less coherent.

At this point in time, Hyperion's wife came looking for him. She was off duty and wanted to spend some precious time with her busy husband. While she had nothing but mothering and gentle words for the animals she worked with, Doria was known to have a sharp tongue for people. Even the Commander wasn't about to interfere with the annoyance she expressed at finding Hyperion so close to

drunk.

Hyperion had a lecherous wish to spend some time with his wife, too, so he stumbled to his feet, toward the door and Doria, narrowly missing a coiled something that ran across the floor, nearly falling into her arms, and finally tripping into the hall. With a sigh, Doria hauled her husband back to his feet.

"Thank you, love. Make the deck stop spinning, will ya? That's m' Doria, good wife, she is," he rambled, muttering as she pulled him away. "You, sirs, ought to get sealed, find out what the good life is."

The door closed on his ramblings.

Hannibal and Christopher were beginning to chuckle again when they noticed the angelic smile on Major Jason's face.

"Midori! Perfect!" He stumbled to his feet and grabbed another glass of the brew. "I christen thee Midori!"

He drained the contents of the glass, then dropped it. He barely made it to his bunk before collapsing, laughing and muttering, "Perfect. Midori..."

Commander Christopher and Captain Hannibal looked at each other and shrugged. Each drank another glass of Midori before they, too, stumbled off to their beds.



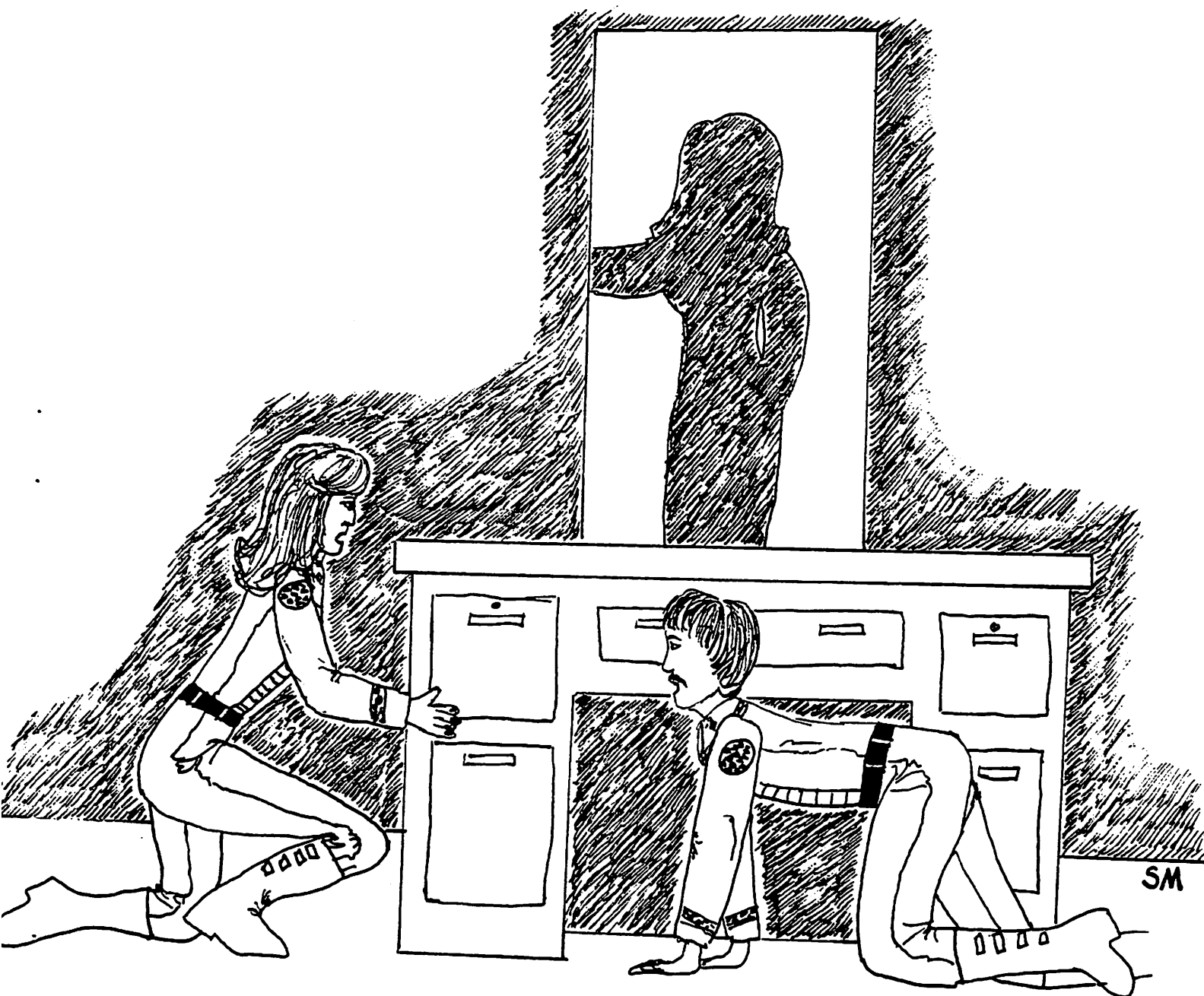
FROM THE
CREW

OF THE
OSIRIS



Collaborators

SHARON MONROE



ALEXANDRA'S DIARY: COLLABORATORS

Well, I've done it, discovered a foolproof way to get myself completely into Captain Diana's bad graces, and to leave myself mystified as well. I guess I must be a fool...

Alexandra stuck her head in the door of the Officers' Club just long enough to ascertain that Captain Diana was present. Seeing the red-haired Captain comfortably settled in one corner, she smiled and headed down the corridor at a rapid pace. From the peculiar smile on Alexandra's lips and the far-away expression in her eyes, anyone who knew her would have been immediately suspicious. The Sergeant was up to something.

Arion hadn't been aboard the OSIRIS long, so he didn't recognise that look as he nearly bumped into her coming around a corner. The look vanished completely as she treated him to a casual glare, then made as if to pass him.

"Hey, Aley, the lounge is the other way! And you owe me a drink from Kobol," he said to her, grinning. He knew it infuriated her to be called "Aley," so he did so at every opportunity.

This time, it got no response. She merely looked at him, a slight question in her eyes, and walked away. "Another time," she called back.

Arion stared after her. He began to wonder what Alexandra might be up to. His eyes narrowed, then he grinned. He wanted to find out. At the very least, it would annoy the woman to have him there at every turn as she tried to set something up. At the most, it might be fun, perhaps even profitable.

Alexandra continued on her way to Engineering, unaware of her shadow. She chuckled somewhat nervously, her mind busy with what would happen in the next centar.

Rhea had just gotten off duty and was waiting for Alexandra. Alexandra's grin widened. Rhea groaned slightly.

"I presume you still want these?" was her first question. She was obviously hoping for -- but not expecting -- a negative response.

"Absolutely." A small packet changed hands. Alexandra examined its contents minutely. "Perfect, as always!"

"Alex, if you get caught, please don't mention my name. Jason is still keeping an eye on me from the last time I made up something special for you. And you know how he worries when he thinks you're up to something."

Alexandra smiled. Major Jason could be quite strict with his junior officers. However, Jason's interest in Alexandra was purely personal.

"Well, Rhea, unless you signed these, no one will know. No one knows I broke the last set, so they won't suspect you're involved. Unless you want to...?"

Rhea threw up her hands. "No! Please!" Then she laughed. "Not this time, anyway."

Alexandra smiled back. The two women had been friends from the beginning of the mission, and Rhea never refused to help Alexandra whenever she asked for it, despite the trouble it sometimes caused. Alexandra's small set-ups were never malicious, only fun, and generally light enough that no official notice was paid to most of her scrapes.

Rhea was more cautious, more concerned about her record than Alex seemed to be. Alexandra's perverse flaunting of certain on-ship rules caused more than one officer to throw his or her hands up in frustration, but somehow the young Sergeant continued to escape with little damage to her service record.

Black-haired Rhea and brown-haired Alexandra watched as Lieutenant Hyperion came toward them from down the corridor, raising his eyebrows as he entered Engineering. Both smiled politely and stepped aside for their superior officer. Neither noticed Arion still standing around the corner, eyes wide, listening intently.

Curiosity was also getting the better of Rhea. "Well, I might hear just a hint, so I know you're not getting into real trouble..."

"I thought you'd come around. I'm afraid this time, though, you really will be better off in the dark. I'm just interested in what's been bothering the Captain since Kobol, and if I can do something about it."

Rhea looked skeptical.

Arion looked very interested.

"We've all been sneaking around, afraid of our own shadows. Diana's really been on edge. I think it may have something to do with something we found on Kobol, so I'm going to do a little investigating."

"And if you find something, then what? Assuming you're not in the brig?"

"I'll work it from there."

"Sounds good, Aley," was Arion's comment.

Both women jumped. Rhea was horrified. Alexandra cursed under her breath. Arion! She should have noticed, should have suspected! Was she losing her touch?

"What are you doing, snooping around like this?" Alexandra demanded, her voice low but furious.

"Finding out what's in your devious mind, Sergeant. I can see it may be my duty to save our good Captain from your little tricks, when they seem to involve breaking into her quarters."

"I don't know anything!" declared Rhea, giving Alexandra a sympathetic look and glaring venom at Arion. "And I don't want to know anything, either. Good luck, Alex." She almost ran down the corridor, glad to be out of the way, but confident Alex would take care of this little intrusion.

Arion and Alexandra watched each other for a few moments, Arion grinning and Alex smiling back, while the mind of each worked rapidly.

"Well?" Alex asked. "What are you going to do?"

"I don't know yet. It's my duty to report this, but I could see letting it go if there was a good cause behind it..."

Angling for an explanation, Alexandra thought. "So you want the whole truth, or I'm in trouble?"

"Possibly."

Alexandra bowed to the inevitable fact that Arion had just become part of her plan. "Of course, if you get involved, you're in the same Viper if it backfires."

He shrugged. "There's rumours of some of your maneuvers, and I'd really like to see how they work from the inside, if it's not too much trouble. Besides, you don't usually get caught."

"I guess I don't have much choice," was the ungracious reply. "Well, come on, we've got a meeting to attend, in the Captain's quarters." She was already moving down the corridor.

Arion followed, wondering if maybe she'd given in too easily. Was there something in this plan that could be dangerous for him? "What do you plan to do?"

"We all know something's been bothering Diana recently, ever since Kobol. I think the answer may be in her quarters. She's been so secretive, and more quiet and distant than ever, even to the Colonel. That's serious. It's also nothing you haven't noticed if you've got half a gram of brains."

He nodded. "I've noticed the tension. But I think you may be taking a lot on yourself that others might not want."

"I've learned to rely on my hunches. Anyway, a quick peek can't hurt, can it? As long as we leave things as we find them..."

Arion felt a twinge of conscience. Or was it just nervousness? "Is it just the three of us? You, me, and Corporal Rhea?"

"Rhea isn't involved. It's you, me, and someone else."

"Jason?"

"No."

They passed Lieutenant Pandora, who did a double-take at them -- walking to-

gether, talking peacefully. It was well known they were not the best of friends. Pandora shook her head. Stranger things had happened, but she couldn't remember when.

Alexandra said no more about Captain Diana. Arion wondered what she'd done with that small package, now apparently gone. He wondered what she wasn't telling him.

In a very short space of time, they found themselves in front of Diana's quarters. Alexandra took a disinterested glance up and down the corridor. It was empty.

"Keep an eye on the corridor," she murmured to her companion.

Arion continued to scan the passage, trying to look casual, and failing. In a moment, he heard a small sound of satisfaction. He turned back to Alex, who was rising from the floor. A quick motion, and something in her hand was hidden again. Arion's eyes nearly popped from his head as she calmly opened the door. He hadn't heard or seen anything as she picked the lock. She certainly seemed to know what she was doing. He wondered if he did.

"After you," he whispered as she gestured toward the open door. She nodded, gave him a mock curtsy, and entered. He took another quick glance down the corridor and followed, closing the door behind him.

Diana's quarters were as neat and precise as the woman herself, but with a feminine touch that was surprising. Arion didn't trust himself to touch anything. "I'll keep an ear to the door," he said, trying to keep an even tone of voice. The woman grinned and began her own scan of the room.

Alexandra made a beeline for a small chest next to the closet. It wasn't standard issue, therefore perhaps meant for things of a more personal nature. She had no more difficulty with its lock than she had with the door.

Arion's voice was suddenly tense. "Someone's outside!"

Alexandra ducked behind the desk, knowing it wouldn't hide them if Diana was returning. Arion was beside her in a flash, pale. Alexandra felt an exasperated sound rise in her throat. He hadn't even turned out the light! She jumped for the light panel, then ducked again, scraping an elbow on the side of the desk. Why hadn't that person entered? It had to be Diana!

The door slid open. A female figure was outlined against the light. She stepped in and closed the door. The room was dark again. Neither Alexandra nor Arion dared to breathe.

"Alex?" came a low voice, a clarion in the silence.

Alexandra breathed in relief, collapsing against the desk.

Light flooded the room, and the two stepped from behind the desk. The new arrival looked astonished to see Arion present. Arion couldn't quite remember who she was.

"Daphne, this is Sergeant Arion, Purple Squadron since we got back to what was left of the Colonies. Arion, this is Survey Tech Second Class Daphne, cultural survey team, specialising in relating art forms to cultural ethics and customs. Sorry, Daphne, but he more or less invited himself along on this one."

Daphne understood the situation and laughed. The twinkle in her eye was familiar to Arion -- he remembered seeing her on Kobol.

"Hello, Arion." The attractive brunette had a lovely smile. "Glad you're with us -- I think. Found anything yet, Alex?"

"I was just looking when you surprised us. When you paused outside, we thought it had to be Diana."

"There were some people passing by. I didn't think it would be in the proper spirit to casually enter the Captain's quarters while the Commander was walking by."

Alexandra was carefully sifting the contents of the small chest. "True." She pulled out the helmet they'd found on Kobol and studied it for a moment.

"Here's the helmet. Identifiable from its markings as belonging to one Captain Apollo of the GALACTICA."

Arion was standing next to Alexandra now. "I think I've heard her mention that name before, when she was talking to the Colonel. A good friend of hers once, I think."

Setting the helmet carefully aside, Alexandra pulled out several other odds and ends, mementoes of the yahrens on the OSIRIS, some from earlier days. "Nothing else here," she said. "Apollo's the key, I'm sure of it." She glanced toward the desk, where Daphne was busy opening drawers.

"There's one drawer here that appears to be locked, Alex."

That was all she needed to hear. Alexandra skipped over to the desk, leaving Arion to replace the items in the chest. In a few moments, he joined the two women. They were sorting through a selection of papers and pictures.

"Success!" pronounced Alexandra as she held up a picture, satisfied. Arion and Daphne stared at the dark-haired, green-eyed man smiling back at them. There was something very special in that gaze, and Alex felt a sudden pang of something only vaguely remembered. She turned the picture over. After the first line, she read no more.

She lay the picture down carefully, pulled several others free, and handed them to Daphne. "Can you do something from these?"

Daphne pursed her lips and studied the images, then nodded. "No trouble at all. The Captain'll love it!"

"What will she love? What are you doing?" asked Arion. He reached for the first picture, only to have Alexandra whisk it out of sight, back into the drawer. In only a micron, the papers were replaced and the drawer locked.

"You know Diana's birthday isn't far off. The way she reacted when that helmet was found, we know this Apollo must mean a lot to her. Now that we have pictures of him, Daphne's going to create something special for her birthday."

Arion was relieved this was nothing underhanded. Impishly, he asked, "Do you plan to tell her how you got the pictures of the man?"

"No, she can think what she wants. We don't even plan on telling her who did it," said Alexandra. "But maybe it'll shake her out of this mood she's been in."

Daphne had glided to the door. "I'll take these with me. Careful you don't get caught leaving!" She listened a micron, then opened the door and was gone.

Arion stood silently, watching as Alexandra made one last check of the room to be sure nothing appeared disturbed. She was satisfied, then turned to the door.

"Well?"

"I'm not sure," Arion said, shaking his head. "You go out of your way to get into trouble, from what I hear, but I know you're a good pilot. You always seem to know what you're doing, and you always seem to carry a secret, and you do things like this. Why?"

She shrugged. "I like to. I need to. It keeps me in practice. I'm not happy if I'm not up to something. It's a hobby, keeps me thinking. It might help Diana snap out of whatever she's in. Just because. Whatever reason you find best, whatever reason fits at the moment. It keeps me different."

He looked thoughtful. "I guess I can understand that. But what if you get caught? I'm sure it won't take Diana long to figure out who's involved. And I, for one, would not like to be caught by Diana at something like this."

"You'll help with that. We don't usually spend any more time together than necessary, and you're the only one she can definitely tie here. She won't think we worked together."

"What do you mean?" Arion felt a deepening suspicion. She wasn't laying this on his shoulders, was she?

A devilish smile was his answer. "Fingerprints, Arion. We were prepared." She strolled to the door, listened, then left, airily waving a farewell.

Standing open-mouthed in the Captain's quarters, Arion suddenly felt very exposed, very vulnerable. If Diana returned now... He fled.

* * * * *

Alexandra noticed Arion avoided her more than usual for the next several days. This didn't bother her. She, and the rest of Purple Squadron, were more concerned with avoiding the glares of the usually imperturbable Captain Diana. More than once, Alexandra felt that the Captain was keeping an observant eye

on her. She wondered if her superior knew something she shouldn't, but decided there was nothing she could do unless Diana said anything. For the moment, all she could do was suspect, and Alexandra wasn't about to give herself away.

Rhea seemed prone to fits of giggling, the immediate reaction to which was a reprimand from Jason to keep her mind on her work.

Jason was keeping a close eye on Alexandra as well. Probably knows something is going on, she thought. She almost regretted not bringing him in on it, but the way the situation stood, he wouldn't really want any part of it.

Daphne busied herself during off-hours with a sculpture, somehow keeping it private, hidden from her own superiors. They wouldn't have associated it with anything, but Daphne preferred privacy anyway, even if Alexandra hadn't asked her to be extra careful.

* * * * *

It was several very long sections before the marble figure was completed. Alexandra saw it for the first time then, as Daphne ceremoniously pulled the cloth cover from it with a flourish.

Alexandra caught her breath, almost in awe, as its creator watched proudly. Daphne was a genius! This stonework contained the spirit of a human being. Somehow, Daphne had captured the essence of the first picture, the special one. There was something soft and warm in the cold stone mouth, and light gleamed in the shadows of the eyes. Gentle curves and angles told the tale of the personality of a young man.

Surely Diana couldn't fault them for creating this!

"Will it suffice?" laughed Daphne.

"Diana should like... No, frak! She should love it! I love it, and I barely knew the man!"

"I love it, and I never knew the man. Wish I had, though." Regret tinged Daphne's voice, then she was business-like again, unusual for her. "When do you plan to give it to her? Her birthday's less than a section from now."

"We cut it close, but it's worth it. From here on, I'll have to keep a watchful eye on when our Captain's out of her quarters."

"I presume you know her usual schedule by now?"

"Of course. She has a patrol tomorrow, with Morgan. I can get in and out then with no trouble."

Suddenly Daphne laughed, reminiscently. "Poor Arion! He does seem to get in- to the middle of things, doesn't he?"

"This, he walked into with open eyes and rapid mouth," declared Alexandra. "Save your sympathy for us if we get caught!"

Daphne laughed aloud. The two women parted several centons later, Daphne to her quarters and Alexandra to hide the well-wrapped bust in her locker.

* * * * *

Somehow, Alexandra found herself pulling the figure from her locker several times for "one last look" before it passed into another's keeping. Each time, she lingered over it longer, until duty called or another intruded on her privacy. She had to remind herself that the statue was a gift for Diana, to remember it was made for someone else.

Only once did she permit herself to wonder why she hadn't gotten to know this man better. Then she sighed, practically considering that any man involved with Diana wouldn't be likely to be interested in a less attractive, younger, more troublesome girl, as she'd been at the Academy. Still, she could dream, couldn't she?

It seemed forever before Diana's patrol was underway. Alexandra carried the well-wrapped gift to the Captain's quarters, staying silent and out of sight. No one paid attention to her unobtrusive movements. She entered as she had before, set the figure on Diana's desk, replaced the pictures. She had to resist an urge to grab the statue, carry it away again, claim it for her own. She forced herself to slip out again. No one knew she'd been there.

It was several long days before there was any outward reaction from Diana. Alexandra, Arion, and Daphne waited.

Daphne remained unconcerned, already involved in a new project. What would happen, would happen. It would be an annoyance for a time, but it would pass.

Arion had never felt quite this degree of guilt before. He was nervous, tried not to show it, and felt even more guilty and spied upon. This was not a good way to impress his superiors! He stayed out of Diana's way.

Alexandra seemed outwardly calm, but inwardly she was seething with curiosity. What would Diana's reaction be? When would it be? Surely she'd opened it by now. Would she know who'd done it? Most likely. There was no better artist than Daphne on the OSIRIS, and no one more likely to commit such an act that Alexandra.

Would she even like it? Or would she see no farther than the inexcusable violation of her personal life and privacy? But, damn it, what could she do? The Captain had been nearly intolerable -- or so Alex told herself. We had to do something, didn't we?

It finally struck Alexandra that she was feeling something she hadn't felt in a long time -- guilt and remorse. She was regretting an action. And she had the uncomfortable feeling it might be more for Apollo than for Diana. She had to shake this mood!

When the ax fell, it was squarely on Alexandra's waiting neck.

During those few days, Diana saw no one more than she had to. On patrol she was silent. With crewmembers or friends, her eyes seemed constantly else-

where. Purple Squadron pilots trod even more carefully than before. Instead of easing tension, Diana's birthday seemed only to have made it worse.

It was almost a relief when Captain Diana summoned Sergeant Alexandra to her quarters a few centars before Alex was due for patrol. Alexandra squared her shoulders and marched stoically into the Captain's quarters. She didn't try to look innocent, merely professional and devoid of expression. After the nerve-wracking past few days, she was prepared to accept whatever punishment Diana was about to mete out, but she wasn't going to betray herself or her friends unnecessarily. It had, after all, been her idea.

Diana was sitting at her desk, quiet and controlled. A bad omen. Alexandra stood at attention.

"You wished to see me, Captain?" she began as formally as possible, trying to interject just the right note of innocent curiosity.

"I did indeed, Sergeant."

There were several centons of silence. Alexandra felt herself beginning to fidget. She thought she'd broken that habit long ago. Now it was manifesting itself again, at the worst moment. Why doesn't she get this over with?

"Was there something you had in mind, Captain?"

"Yes."

Again, nothing for several centons. I'm going to scream, Alex thought. Say something! Anything!

"Have you anything to say, Sergeant? Before I begin?"

"Concerning what, ma'am?"

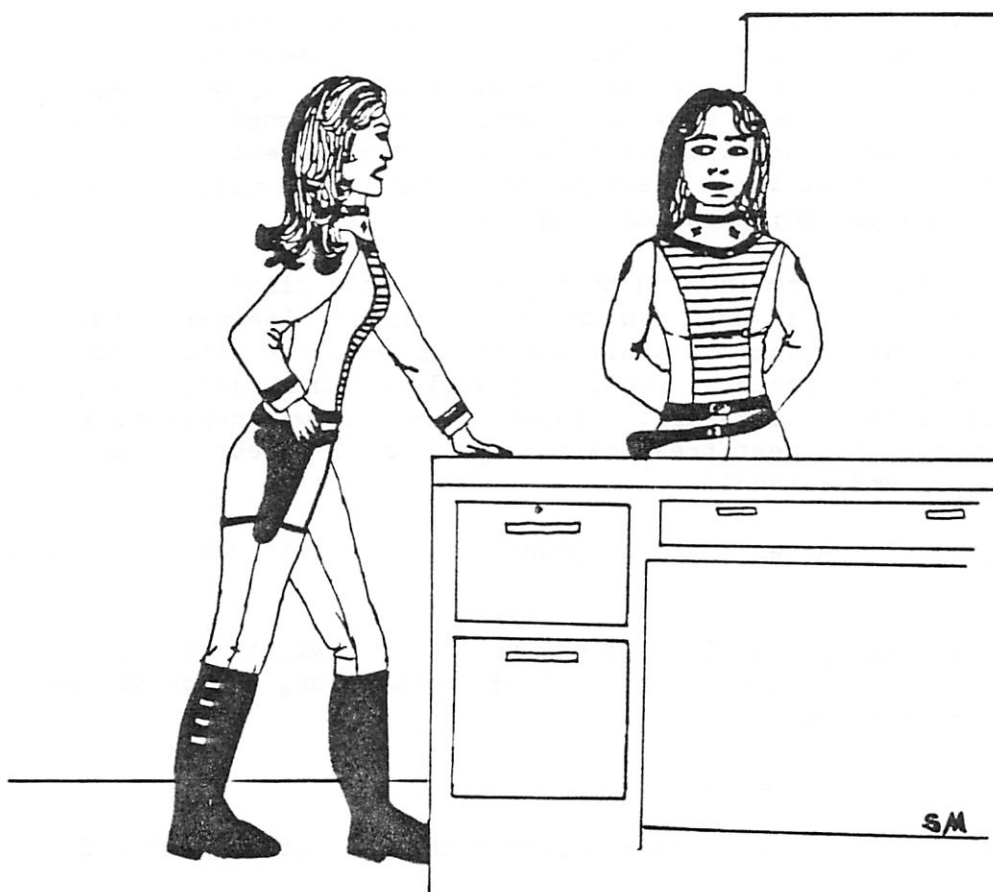
"Don't play the innocent with me. I know you're involved." Diana drew upon some tremendous inner self-control to stop the near-scream.

"Captain?" Alexandra felt herself wilting. In a moment, she'd be on her knees, through the floor -- if she didn't break and run first! To Hades with discipline!

"Very well," Diana snapped. "We'll play it that way." She was in complete control as she rose from the desk, stalked to her closet. From it, she pulled a stone image of a young man, carried it carefully to the desk, and set it down.

"It seems, Sergeant, that someone saw fit to give this to me as a birthday gift. However, they left it without a note, so I don't know who it's from. Would you have any idea who might have done it?" Her voice was glacier ice, her eyes volcanic fire. Alexandra had the feeling that, given a choice, Diana would rather be throwing things at her and screaming. "After all, they deserve my gratitude, some thanks."

Alexandra had never seen Diana like this before, and she hoped she never would



again. She prayed she would get out of the room alive.

"It was your birthday, sir... Uh, ma'am." Her voice had a quiver she wasn't able to control; she tried to firm it up. "We thought... That is, I thought this would have some meaning for you."

"It has meaning. It means someone was in my quarters when they should not have been. It means someone 'borrowed' personal items without permission. It means someone thinks so little of respect and privacy that they feel they can do anything without fear of recrimination. This cannot be allowed aboard a battlestar."

Alexandra was silent, meek, seething inside as her stomach knotted.

"Don't try that with me," Diana snapped again. "I know you -- you've probably already got some new scheme in mind, equally unethical and illegal. I should have you up before a tribunal!" Diana was having a problem holding her voice down to a reasonable decibel level. "Have you anything to say?"

Alexandra didn't dare open her mouth. She bent her head. If her legs would obey her brain, she'd have been halfway to the launch bay, never to return. Tribunal!

Diana sat down again. She still looked dangerous.

"Alexandra, in the past your practical jokes and small plots have been perfectly legal and harmless, at least those we've discovered. I've been patient with them, looking the other way several times you may be unaware of. Should this particular incident show up on your service record, however, you could be discharged, dishonourably, with little hope of appeal. I suggest you keep this in mind. I will not hesitate to order a tribunal, should it be necessary." Diana paused; Alexandra squirmed.

"However, I'm keeping in mind that you're a good pilot and a valuable member of this crew. Your time can be better spent elsewhere than in the brig. Therefore, considering the small amount of evidence likely to be discovered should I press the issue, I believe I will let the matter drop for now. I will remember this, Alexandra. Inform your fellow conspirators, whoever they are, that they had best tread carefully. And I expect better behaviour from you. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Captain." After a slight pause, "I am not to consider this blackmail, ma'am?"

"Consider it what you will. It may be the only way to keep you in line. Do you think you can manage to stay out of trouble long enough to benefit from my overlooking this, uh, incident?"

"I'll certainly try, Captain."

Diana sighed. "I suppose that's better than an out-and-out refusal. Do more than try, Sergeant."

"Yes, ma'am."

"I believe you're due on patrol shortly?"

"I am indeed, Captain."

"You are dismissed, Alexandra. Sometimes... Never mind, you may go," she said. The Sergeant nodded and turned to the door.

Alexandra felt profound relief flooding through her. As she passed through the doorway, she chanced one glance behind her. Diana was staring thoughtfully into space, one hand lightly stroking the cheek of the marble Apollo.

Alexandra sighed and closed the door. The Captain did like the thing, but something about it must disturb her immensely. Whatever it was, Alexandra knew it would be a very cold day in Hades before she tried to figure it out.

I dashed down the corridor, thankful I'd been so lucky. My only punishment (to date, anyway) has been to have my name put on the emergency roster. If anybody can't make their patrol, for illness or whatever, I'm on call for it. But it could've been a lot worse.

I'm still puzzled about the relationship between Diana and Apollo. I think what's going to stay with me longest is the image of Diana gazing so strangely at the stone copy of a living man.

GRADUATION



STORY & ART BY
MARJ IHSEN

"Graduation"

(By Marj Ihssen)

Apollo sat shuddering on his bed. If he could ever see straight enough to find Starbuck, he'd kill him! Cradling his aching head in one hand, he felt around for his uniform, but it wasn't close at hand. If it wasn't here, where in Hades was it? Oh, Lords...

It all started innocently enough, with a party in the recreation room for another batch of newly qualified cadets, who'd finally been declared "safe" to fly with, and to celebrate the sighting of a star system with planets where they could replenish their fuel and food stocks.

Apollo enjoyed the party. Most of the cadets were women and wet-behind-the-ears kids, but enough pilots from Blue Squadron turned out to make it into quite a bash. Mushies were flying, and the ambrosia was disappearing at a rapid rate. Someone must have added something to the punch, however, because things began to get out of control. Even Apollo, who'd had plenty of practice drinking with Starbuck, began to feel the effects. There'd been a pyramid game going at one of the tables, but when the ambrosia hit, the game slowed to a stop. Greenbean left his winning hand on the table to follow a curvaceous cadet; Capricana left the party entirely; and Starbuck fled when he saw both Athena and Cassiopeia approaching.

Apollo wandered in search of Starbuck and noticed Reisa sitting alone at a table. Reisa! Lords! She'd like to driven him crazy during her training. She'd been a Lieutenant Colonel on the Vandusian mining colony. Assigned to cadet training by Adama himself after she'd tried to take off on her own, she'd been a problem. Impatient with what she openly termed children's lessons, she'd often disrupted classes. He had to admit she'd turned out to be a superb pilot, but she still challenged his authority every chance she had. Somehow, she always seemed to be doing the wrong thing -- or the right thing the wrong way -- like she was deliberately trying to infuriate him. If it hadn't been for Adama's express orders, he'd long ago have relegated her to shuttle pilot -- for the agro ships!

Remembering a long list of grievances, a spiflicated Apollo wandered over to the table. Surveying Reisa's slouched posture, he roared out in his best military voice, "Cadet!"

Reisa nearly jumped out of the chair. When she managed to reorganise her scattered senses, she looked up to find Apollo glaring at her across the table.

"Cadet, has anyone ever told you you have as much discipline as a Thoskian grub borer?"

While Reisa's muddled mind tried to sort out that statement, Apollo proceeded to let fly with every mistake, every goof she'd ever made, every time she'd

spoken out of turn.

It wasn't an especially bright idea. As head of the Vandusian ground forces, Reisa was used to handling drunken miners and settlers. Staggering to her feet, she put an end to Apollo's "list" with a wild roundhouse swing, a swing that, because she'd spent seven yahrens on a double-gravity world, sent the Captain sliding across the floor.

Apollo edged himself to a sitting position, rubbing his jaw. Oh, frak! He looked up to see Reisa swaying above him.

"Get up and fight like a Warrior," she taunted him.

Apollo got to his feet and, concentrating fiercely, managed a rush at Reisa without tripping over his own feet. She tried to dodge, but long arms reached out and wrapped themselves around her.

"Fight like a Warrior? I'll fight like a man!" he muttered as he bent down to kiss her. He expected wild resistance, or a resounding slap. In fact, part of him was screaming, "What in Hades do you think you're doing?" But her body seemed to mold itself to his, and her hands eased themselves around his waist. Their kiss seemed to go on forever, to somehow blend into the haze of the ambrosia.

* * * * *

Reisa stirred warily, aware of a horrendous hangover. Very gently, she tried to ease one eye open. That was the worst, or the best, ambrosia she'd ever tasted, but... With both eyes open, she froze. This wasn't her quarters! She attempted to sit up, almost passed out, found her uniform missing, and found she wasn't alone, all in one shattering moment. Beside her, disturbed by her movements, Apollo was stirring. You don't get to be a lieutenant colonel without being able to make snap decisions. Since between the two of them they didn't have a stitch of clothing -- talk about sobering up in a hurry! -- and there weren't any uniforms in sight -- where in Hades...? -- Reisa threw caution to the winds and, grabbing the sheet, headed for the door.

His Warrior instincts still operating despite a hangover, Apollo leaped from the bed in time to see a female form, wrapped in a bedsheet, scurrying through the door. He dashed after her, only to see the tail end of the sheet disappearing around a corner. A very startled Boomer stared at him.

"Boomer, did you see who that was?"

"Er... Ah... Apollo, uh..."

"Boomer?"

"Your uniform's missing, Captain," Boomer replied, straight-faced.

Apollo glanced down and abruptly disappeared into his quarters, leaving a grinning Boomer gazing at the closed door.

"That must have been some party, Apollo," Boomer chuckled to himself as he

proceeded down the corridor to file his patrol report.

Inside his quarters, Apollo confirmed the fact that his clothing was nowhere to be found, and his hazy mind could provide no clue as to where, why, how, or with whom. And now that his reactions were settling down, oh, what a hang-over! When he got his hands on Starbuck...

* * * * *

Centars later, Reisa was on the surface of a planet, taking out her hangover and frustration on the innards of one of the lizards they were butchering to help replenish the Fleet's meat supply. Somehow, the job fitted her mood. A forty-foot lizard was a golmongering mess to clean. She was drenched in sweat and blood and muck when the final carcass was done.

Wearily, she called in. "We've finished the field dressing. You can send a shuttle for one last load."

"It's already on its way," Lieutenant Capricana replied over the comlink. "Save a haunch for the camp tonight, will you? I'll come out in the landram in a couple of centars and pick you up."

"Thanks, I could use some time to clean up," Reisa replied. "Out."

After the last load was aboard the shuttle, Reisa set a beacon for the landram and went in search of the river they'd spotted earlier. To one side was a broad, quiet pool with tree-shaded banks. She dipped water to wash her face, then stopped and viewed her reflection in disgust. Even her hair was full of muck. She'd actually had to crawl inside some of the larger beasts. Checking that the area was clear, she stripped off her uniform and washed the mess from it. Once it was relatively clean, she spread it on the riverbank to dry. She left her laser on a handy flat rock and waded into the water, then used a handful of sand as soap to scrub the blood and grime from her body and hair. She swam for a while to rinse, then floated peacefully near the rocks.

The lapping water seemed to drain some of the tension from her body, but did nothing to ease the confusion in her mind. "Oh, Thon, what have I done?" she cried silently. Her whole purpose in flight training, in fighting, was to send as many Cylons as possible as an honour guard for her dead husband and son. All she had been aimed toward that, but now...

Her reaction to Apollo caught her entirely off guard. She'd hated him. Stuck up, authoritative, perfectionist, he'd picked on her unmercifully during training. Several times, she'd almost fled to Starbuck in tears. Her memory may have been lost in the ambrosia, but her body knew what had happened last night. Oh, Thon! Oh, Lords! Why?

Reisa's reverie was broken by a thrashing in the brush. Grabbing her laser and seeking the cover of the rocks, she waited.

Apollo burst through the brush to skid to a stop on the riverbank. A quick look revealed the uniform drying on the bank, the aimed laser, and the figure crouched behind the rocks.

A grin of mischief crossed Apollo's face. At first, he'd worried when Reisa wasn't at the beacon as Capricana said she'd be. That was why he'd gone looking for her. But swimming -- now, that wasn't such a bad idea. His clothing quickly joined hers on the bank.

In dismay, Reisa retreated deeper into the water. As Apollo's lean brown body glided through the water toward her refuge, she abandoned her laser and retreated. Playfully, he splashed at her, easily matching her best attempts at escape and diving under to tug gently at her feet and ankles. Almost sobbing in frustration, Reisa kicked out furiously. One foot grazed the side of his head, and in retaliation Apollo pulled her under the water. Caught unprepared, she breathed water and desperately fought toward the surface, only marginally aware of strong hands holding her, guiding her toward the bank. Weakly, she clung to a rock, gratefully drawing deep breaths of air. Apollo stayed near her.

"Hey, I'm sorry. Are you all right?" He reached to help as coughs racked her frame. But she flinched from his touch, nearly losing her hold on the rocks. Apollo steadied her until she regained her grip. He watched her, puzzled. The Reisa he knew from cadet training would have turned on him and probably tried to drown him. He didn't understand her reaction. Was she afraid of him? "I won't hurt you. I didn't mean..."

Afraid of him, afraid even of herself, Reisa frantically climbed the bank and dashed to her uniform. Hearing Apollo leaving the water behind her, she abandoned any attempts at dressing and blindly turned to flee.

"Reisa, stop! You're not even dressed!" Strong hands grabbed her arms. She tried to escape and tripped, nearly falling, and the hands drew her close to steady her.

Apollo found himself staring into tear-filled brown eyes. He cocked his head in puzzlement. The look in her eyes, the feel of her against him... A wondering smile crossed his face. "It was you last night in my quarters, wasn't it?" He was surprised when she collapsed against him, sobbing wildly. Still holding her, he eased himself down until his back was against a stump, listening -- and understanding -- as her grief and confusion poured out. He'd felt the same way after Serina died, and had unconsciously tried to follow her, taking every risky mission he could. Sheba once accused him of actively seeking his own death.

And Diana... He remembered his desperate attempt to reach Serina's spirit, an attempt that brought him to the edge of death. He hadn't found Serina, but had learned instead that Diana was alive -- and still loved him. His contact with her somehow enabled him to mourn, to accept Serina's death, and Zac's. Her enduring love gave him a reason to live, to enjoy life again.

Apollo's attention returned to the woman in his arms as he felt her sobbing ease. Gently, he brushed the hair from her eyes, refusing to relinquish his hold as she tried to pull away from him. Pain-filled eyes turned to stare at him.

"Apollo?"

"You can't live in the past, Reisa. You can't lock yourself up inside. Thon wouldn't have wanted that, would he?" He watched her absorb that. "And you have friends who care for you -- Capricana, Starbuck, me."

Apollo surprised himself, but it was true -- he did care for her. Despite the way she irritated him, there was much about her to admire. In addition to being a highly competent pilot, she was good with the younger cadets, patient in dealing with wounded and frightened civilians. Smiling, he remembered her crazy bet with Starbuck as to who could roll a Viper the most times without passing out... "It's no crime to want to live," he added.

"I can cope with that, Apollo," her grief-roughened voice answered. "But not with you."

"With me?" Apollo gently reached out to turn her head to face him and found his answer in her eyes, seeing the love mixed in with the pain. He drew her against his shoulder, holding her tightly. He felt one hand stir to lightly trace patterns across his arms and in the wet hair on his chest, a cool touch that seemed to leave a trail of fire.

Apollo suddenly found himself in the grip of needs and desires he'd suppressed too long. His heart began to pound as Reisa's hands continued moving. He bent his head to kiss her forehead, but she turned so his lips met hers. What was intended as a gentle kiss grew fierce, demanding. The warmth of her body beside him aroused an answering flame in him. Eager hands touched, feeling muscles shift and move under the skin. The fire grew...

* * * * *

Reisa sat leaning against the stump, lovingly viewing the man sleeping beside her. Apollo -- his caring was an anchor point, something to cling to when memories of the past threatened to send her down into grief again. Even if he saw her only as comrade and friend...

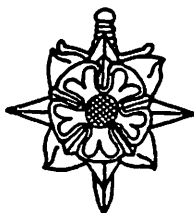
Beside her, Apollo stirred restlessly, moaning. "No... No... Serina..."

She sighed. He'd never forget Serina, would always grieve for her. And there was another -- Serina's name wasn't the only one he'd cried out in the heights of passion. Someone called Diana...

Reisa reached out and shook him gently, to wake him. "I love you, Apollo," she whispered quietly. "I'll always love you. I can face that now. But I'll never try to hold you, to chain you. Whatever place you have for me..."

Apollo awoke with a start. "Serina?" Then he flushed in embarrassment as he realised who sat beside him.

"I understand, Apollo." Reisa reached out to gently touch the silvery ankh that hung on a fine chain around his neck. "I understand."



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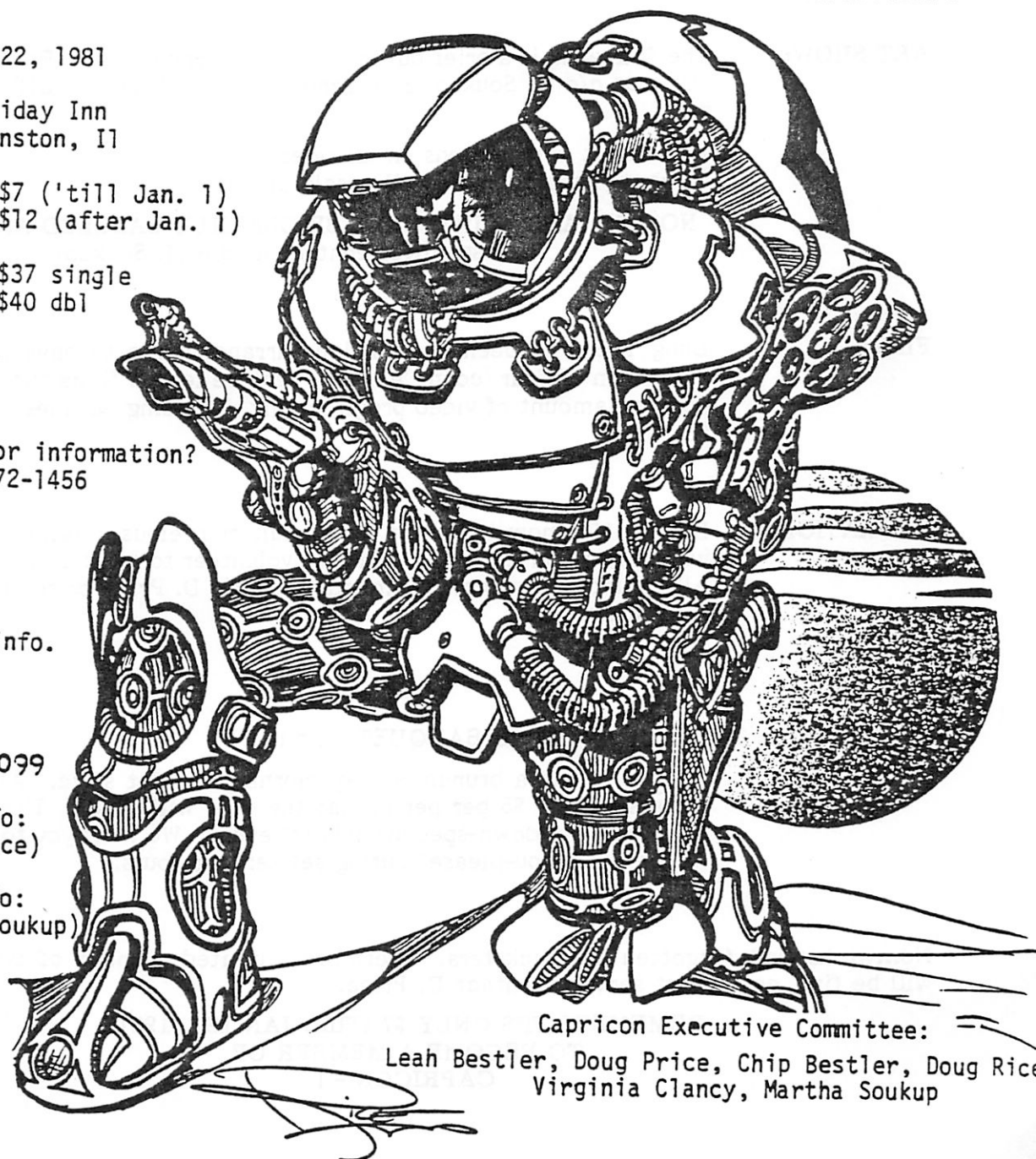
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Capricon Executive Committee:

Leah Bestler, Doug Price, Chip Bestler, Doug Rice
Virginia Clancy, Martha Soukup

PROGRAMMING: Try a trivia contest? If you have a team already set up, let us know; otherwise, there will be plenty of time for advance sign-up.

GOH speech and interview sessions will be held on Saturday.

Moebius Theatre will perform on Saturday night — never before seen material.

REGISTRATION: PLEASE! Note the cut-off for pre-memberships. The earlier you become a member—the earlier you receive your information packet and hotel info. (write c/o L. Bestler).

All executive committee members are authorized to take memberships — also Amy Schaefer, assistant treasurer. The exec committee is listed on the front of the flier.

ART SHOW: The following is a brief outline of the Art Show rules. For more info, write us c/o M. Soukup (emergency info call 312-465-0312 after 6:00 p.m.).

10 percent commissions on all sales.

50 cents hanging fee on all unsold pieces

NOTICE: ALL PRINTS WILL BE CLEARLY LABELED AS PRINTS
(for specifics contact us c/o M. Soukup)

FILMS: Doug Rice has been busy making arrangements to have not only a minimum of four (count 'em — 4) feature length films but also a significant amount of video programming, including Japanese animation features.

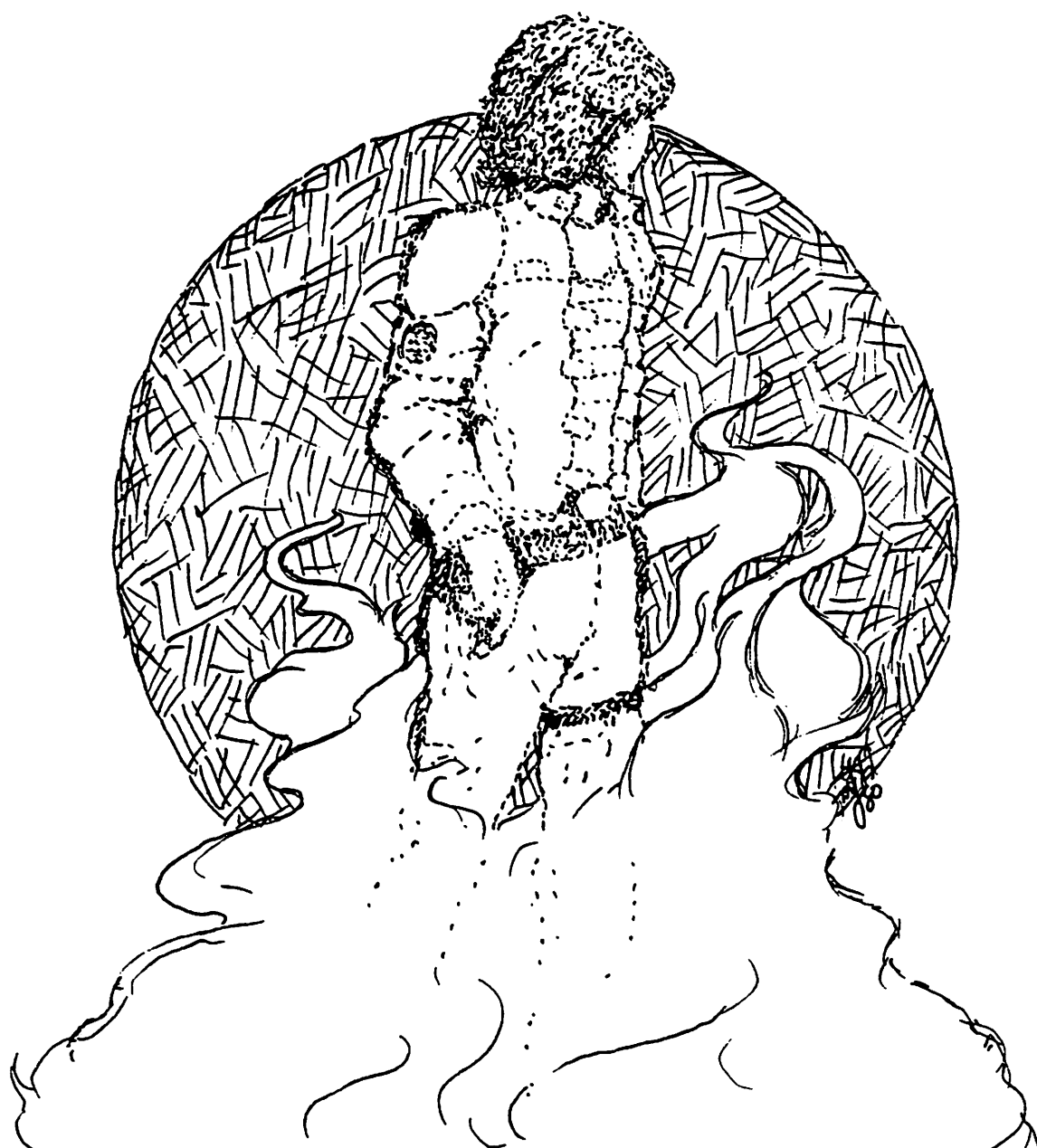
OPERATIONS: HELP! We know there are wonderful, marvelous, intelligent persons just waiting for the opportunity to volunteer to work at a convention. All volunteers welcome.....contact us c/o D. Price or see him at the convention.

BY THE WAY, THERE WILL BE NO BANQUET.....but,

we are having a brunch Sunday morning—buffet style. All advance tickets will be \$5 per person...at the door will be \$8. This is not an "everyone-sit-down-speech-making" event. We want you to relax and "come-in-as-you-please" during set serving hours.

No...we haven't forgotten you hucksters. There are a limited quantity of tables, so it will be first come first serve. Contact D. Price.

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CAPRICON - I**



encounter

by Joy Harrison & David Morgan

"Encounter"

(By Joy Harrison and David Morgan)

Diana and Morgan held positions as the rest of Purple Squadron landed aboard the OSIRIS. Their patrol had been totally uneventful -- three systems checked, all with barren planets that had never known life. No clues, either, to the location of the GALACTICA and her fleet.

And no Cylons. Diana almost wished they'd encountered some. She needed to take her frustration out on something, and the squadron could use the target practice. Ever since they'd left Carillon -- or the place Carillon should have been...

"Captain, the rest of the squadron's in. We're clear to land."

"Thanks, Morgan. You go ahead."

Diana watched critically as her wingman made his final approach to the port landing bay. She'd flown with Morgan for the past four yahrens, ever since the OSIRIS left the Colonies. He was as good a pilot as she was, and he had all the abilities required of a squadron commander. If Commander Christopher ever decided they had enough ships -- and crew -- for a fourth squadron, Morgan would lead it.

Diana smiled faintly. Morgan was a very special friend, perhaps the only man aboard the OSIRIS she felt at all close to. An Academy graduate like herself, he'd entered the Colonies' top military institution late, and the OSIRIS was his first ship. Diana met him in an astrophysics class. She was noted as an exceptionally hard -- though unswervingly fair -- instructor, and Morgan was her most difficult -- and most brilliant -- student. He should have been; when he entered the Academy, he probably knew more about astrophysics than anyone else in the Colonies.

Friends by the end of that class session, Diana and Morgan spent a good deal of time together until the OSIRIS assignments were posted, just before his graduation. As both combat pilots and astrosurvey experts, they were delighted to be part of the crew. They were also delighted, for personal reasons, to be aboard the same ship.

Morgan never pried, never pressured, and before long Diana found herself trusting him more than anyone else on the mission. She never told him everything, but Morgan knew a lot -- and much of what he didn't know, he guessed. In a way, Diana loved him, though perhaps not as she knew he loved her. She was in love with someone else, and had been for yahrens; Morgan understood, and never allowed it to interfere with the closeness of their relationship.

Diana sighed. In some ways, Morgan was so very much like Apollo... They were about the same age, the same height and build, although Apollo was dark, with eyes as green as her own, while Morgan was fair, his hair the colour of dark gold. Both men were gentle, sensitive; both had a quiet confidence in their

strength and abilities. Strangers often thought them moody, misinterpreting a natural reserve for withdrawal, although it was true Apollo and Morgan were both rather shy.

With another smile, Diana shook tumbled red curls out of her eyes, then turned her Viper to its approach path and started in. A couple of drinks in the Officers' Club, a quiet meal, a couple of centars' conversation in her quarters, and...

Suddenly the small fighter wavered, shifting dangerously from its course.

"Viper Two! Cancel approach! Pull up, Diana! Pull up!"

She responded to the panic in the voice, forcing her Viper into a tight turn. Everything seemed to be spinning crazily around her.

"Diana! What's wrong?" The Flight Commander's worried voice crackled through the static on the com.

"I... I don't know, Lyra," Diana answered uncertainly. "I suddenly got dizzy and..."

"Are you all right? Can you land?"

"I think so."

Determined, the Captain concentrated grimly on her approach, blocking out everything else. The landing was far from perfect, but both ship and pilot were unhurt. Diana climbed from the cockpit -- and literally collapsed in Morgan's arms.

* * * * *

Several centars later, Diana opened her eyes in a quiet, darkened room, an unfamiliar bed. Where...? Faint sounds and odours told her -- Life Centre. With a sigh, she closed her eyes again, falling into a deep, natural sleep. When she awoke again, the first thing she saw was the worried face of the OSIRIS's Flight Commander.

"I'm all right, Lyra," Diana said, answering the unspoken question with a reassuring smile. "Really."

"You still look a little pale. What happened?"

Diana frowned. "I don't know exactly. Everything was fine, then suddenly..." She shrugged.

"Dr. Senbi says there's nothing wrong with you. But he wants to keep you here overnight, for observation. Just to be sure, he said."

"Lyra, that's ridiculous! I'm perfectly all right." Diana started to get out of the bed.

"You'll do as you're told, Captain. That's an order."

"Lyra..."

"I said that's an order, Diana. I meant it. Now, get some rest."

Lyra left, grinning, and a fuming Diana threw a pillow -- the only object in reach -- after her. Morgan had to duck the missile as he came through the door. His expression of concern vanished when he saw her.

"You certainly don't look sick," he observed, noting the angry fire in her eyes.

"I'm not. That frimp Senbi wants to keep me here for 'observation.' I feel fine, and..."

"Hey, I'm not arguing, Diana." He held up his hands in mock surrender. "Senbi's probably just worried, that's all. When you fainted..."

"I fainted? Morgan, I never..."

"Yes, you did. I was there, remember? You were unconscious more than four centars." He sat down on the bed beside her, put his hands on her shoulders. "Diana, you scared me. I was afraid of losing you."

Diana touched his cheek lightly, affectionately. "Morgan, I'm all right. Really."

"I know." He kissed her forehead. "Want to tell me what happened?"

"I honestly don't know. I was watching you land, thinking about you and..." Her voice trailed off, her eyes suddenly far away.

"And what?"

"I was thinking how alike... And then..." Her eyes searched his, as if seeking an explanation for something she couldn't understand. "Morgan, if I'm not sick, why in Hades..."

"I don't know, Diana. I don't know." He took her in his arms. She was trembling. "Hey, you're not afraid, are you?" he asked gently.

Her answer, muffled against his shoulder, was barely audible. It surprised him. "Yes."

Morgan was even more surprised when she began to cry. For a few centons, he just held her, not knowing what else to do. "It's all right, Diana," he murmured. "It's all right."

Finally Diana raised her head, wiping tears from her eyes. "I'm sorry, Morgan. I didn't mean to..."

"It's all right, remember?" He cocked his head, regarding her thoughtfully. "You know, you're even beautiful when you cry."

She couldn't help laughing. "Morgan, Morgan, you're utterly incorrigible."

"Well," he replied, "you can't blame me for trying. And, since you obviously can't go to the Officers' Club with me tonight, how about having our drink right here?" He pulled a bottle of ambrosia from under his jacket.

"Morgan! If Senbi sees that..."

"Don't worry about him; he's not around. Lavanna saw it and just winked."

Diana laughed helplessly, throwing her arms around him. "You're not just incorrigible -- you're absolutely incredible!"

Morgan hugged her briefly, and for a micron found himself praying the man she loved -- Apollo, a man he'd never met -- was dead. He didn't want to see Diana hurt. Not ever. But...

"Shall we have our drink now?" he asked, releasing her. When Diana nodded, he unsealed the bottle and, taking a glass from the stand beside her bed, filled it, then handed it to her. "To another successful mission."

"And to the GALACTICA," Diana added softly.

Morgan nodded. "The GALACTICA," he echoed. They both drank, arms entwined.

Diana leaned against Morgan, her head on his shoulder, yawning sleepily. He put his arm around her. "Tired?"

She nodded, not raising her head.

"Sleep, then. Sleep, Diana. I won't leave you. Sleep..."

Morgan's low voice had a strangely hypnotic quality. Diana sighed contentedly and closed her eyes, listening to his voice and to the steady beat of his heart. She was asleep in less than a centon.

Morgan sat for a long time, holding the sleeping Diana in his arms. His eyes, too, were closed, but he wasn't asleep. Seeking to protect her, he reached out silently to touch her mind, looking for an explanation for what had happened that day.

* * * * *

Fog. Dense, swirling grey clouds. Cold. Lifeless.

A vast empty plain. Barren. Forbidding. Endless.

Dark, silent nothingness. And someone lost, trapped. Someone in grave danger...

Diana -- and one other...

* * * * *

In the sectors that followed, Diana completely forgot her strange "illness." She had too many other things to think about. Dr. Senbi and his medical staff

released her the morning after her brief dizzy spell, since she suffered no lingering adverse effects. When she left Life Centre, she found Morgan waiting at the door.

"Good morning, pretty lady. What would you like to do today?"



"Morgan!" Diana's eyes sparkled with delight. "You're off duty, too?"

"Sure am. So, I repeat, what would you like to do?"

"You mean, other than get in my Viper and fly, just for the pure joy of it, just because I feel so wonderful?"

Grinning, Morgan nodded. He took Diana's arm and started walking down the corridor. "Well, since we both know Lyra and Tyr won't allow it -- and since there's only room for one in a Viper..."

Diana laughed. "You are dreadful, Lieutenant," she teased. "What will people think?"

Suddenly very serious, Morgan stopped, turned her to face him. "Do you really care?" His voice was unsteady.

"Morgan, I..." His kiss silenced her, and when he finally released her, she was too stunned, too breathless to talk. She stared at him for several microns. Then her eyes filled with tears, and she turned away.

"I wish you hadn't done that," she said, her voice so low he barely heard it.

"Why, Diana? You know I love you. Why should I hide it?"

She shook her head, not answering, and Morgan turned her to face him once more. He wiped a tear from her cheek. "I know," he said gently. "You told me about Apollo, and I know you love him. But you don't even know if he's alive. And even if he is, we don't know when -- or even if -- we'll ever find the GALACTICA." He put his arms around her, holding her. "Diana, you can't wait for him forever. You..."

"Oh, Morgan," Diana whispered, "don't you understand? I love him. I always will. But I... Oh, Lords, Morgan, I love you, too."

Morgan kissed her again, gently this time, without passion. "You can love us both, can't you? And I'm willing to take second place in your heart. It's enough I have a place there at all."

Diana studied his face wonderingly, as if she'd never seen him before. "You really mean that," she said. "But how...? Morgan, some day I'm going to have to choose between you. I don't know how I can. I..."

"Hey, don't worry about that now. It may never happen. And when it does -- if it does -- you'll find a way. Now," he said, changing both subject and mood abruptly, "how about the zoo?"

* * * * *

A klaxon blared, and Diana awoke in terror, not sure why she was afraid. She'd been dreaming; that much, she remembered. Her dream had been of empti-

ness, fog...

She struggled into her uniform and started for the door, then froze. No! There'd been someone in her dream. She'd been following someone, trying to reach him...

Him? How did she know that? Who was he?

As she dashed for her Viper, Diana was still trying to understand her dream, trying to determine whom she was following, and why. Why did she feel it was so terribly urgent she reach the man before...

Before what?

She couldn't shake the fear, the strange sense of dread that settled over her, that lingered throughout the day. More than once, as the OSIRIS squadrons fought off the Cylon attack, other pilots had to fly to Diana's rescue; she couldn't even hit a Cylon she had dead centre on her attack scanner.

After the battle and once they were back aboard the OSIRIS, Morgan watched her in concern. She was nervous, edgy. And when he tried to talk to her, she literally ran to her quarters. Morgan followed -- but the door was locked, and she wouldn't answer him.

* * * * *

Diana stood in the midst of an alien plain, following someone she could barely see through the dense, swirling fog. The plain seemed endless, and she felt trapped, unable to escape. But whatever the reason, whatever the compulsion driving her, Diana knew she had to reach the man ahead of her. It seemed more and more urgent, as if she were running out of time.

She struggled across the plain for what seemed an eternity. Her sense of urgency grew stronger with every passing micron. She had to reach that man. She had to.

Then, suddenly, Diana knew whom she was following. It was Apollo.

He seemed to be searching for something or someone, searching desperately, hopelessly. Diana was terribly afraid she wouldn't reach him in time.

In time for what? She still didn't know. But she knew she was almost out of time when she finally caught him.

Apollo was startled. He reached out to touch her, as if to reassure himself that she was real. "You shouldn't be here, Diana. You're not dead. You don't belong here. Go back while you still can."

Diana shook her head. "I can't, Apollo. I don't know why, but I have to be here. Besides," she added, "you're not dead, either."

"I should be. I should have died, not Serina."

There was so much pain in his eyes as he said the name, Diana felt she had to



do something -- anything -- to help him. "Tell me about her, Apollo," she said quietly.

"You'd have liked her," he replied, not looking at her. "In many ways, she was a lot like you..." His voice trailed off, and there were tears in his eyes.

Maybe if he could cry... "Go on."

"She was a newswoman, a journalist, on Caprica. When the Cylons attacked, she was at the Presidium, describing the preparations for the peace celebration. It became a live account of the holocaust. We picked it up aboard the GALACTICA. We were too late to stop it. We watched our people, our homes, our worlds destroyed..."

He took a deep breath, then went on. "Serina was among the survivors, she and her son. He was unhappy, very depressed, because he'd lost his pet daggit, and she asked me to help. So we built him a mechanical daggit. Then, after Carillon, Boxey -- he's the little boy -- and Athena maneuvered to get Serina and me together. We were already friends, because of Boxey, and their plotting worked. We were sealed just before we found Kobol, a yahren ago..."

There were tears in his eyes again. Dear Lord, Diana thought, what if she was wrong? What if talking about Serina didn't help? She couldn't bear to see him hurt like this...

"...The Cylons attacked us there. Baltar had set a trap. And Serina..." He closed his eyes briefly, fought for control, won. "Serina was killed."

He looked at Diana then -- really looked at her -- for the first time. She could barely hear him when he spoke again. "I loved her, Diana. I thought you were dead, that I'd lost you forever. I knew I'd always love you, but I loved her, too. And then the Cylons..."

Apollo was crying at last. Diana held him and let him cry, sharing his grief. They clung to each other for a long time.

His next words surprised her. They shouldn't have. The Commander always said his children were psychic.

"One day, long after she died, I had a dream about Serina. She came to me, talked to me. Only I've never really been sure it was a dream. Because, centars later, when I was on patrol, there was an accident; and then Serina came again. She left me something..."

He drew a fine chain from beneath his collar. A small silvery ankh was hanging from it. His hand closed tightly over the ankh, and for a micron, there were tears in his eyes again. "She died exactly a yahren ago, Diana. So many strange things have happened to me since, I decided I'd try to reach her. I thought I could. But I can't find her..."

"What kind of 'strange things,' Apollo?" Diana asked, determined to keep him talking if she could. Perhaps she could find out what was happening to them and maybe, in the process, find a way home for both of them.

"There was a... A kind of vision. A Cylon attack force I kept seeing. I thought I was losing my mind, seeing things that weren't real. Then..." He broke off, caught her hands tightly in his. His intensity was almost frightening. "Diana, it was a precognitive vision, a glimpse of something in the future. The Cylons really had set a trap for us. And because of what I saw, we were able to surprise them instead."

Diana shivered, and Apollo took her in his arms again, held her as tightly as he'd held her hands only microns before. It was as if he was afraid of losing her in the fog. Or perhaps afraid she'd leave him. She thought she'd never seen him so distraught, so terribly vulnerable.

"Zac's dead, Diana," he said suddenly, abruptly.

Startled, she looked up into his eyes, and he turned away. "Dead? How?" She couldn't really believe Zac was gone. "What happened?"

"He took one of Starbuck's patrols. It was just before we were to meet the Cylons, to sign the peace treaty, and it was his first patrol. He was so eager... Only there wasn't going to be any peace. The Cylons were waiting, maybe a thousand of them. We turned back to warn the Fleet. Zac's Viper was hit; he couldn't keep up. I had to leave him behind..."

"Apollo..." Diana felt his pain like a physical blow, and her tears were as much for Apollo as for Zac. Over a yahren, and he'd never spoken of it to anyone, not even Starbuck. He'd kept all the grief, all the anguish and remorse to himself. And the guilt. The Lords knew he wasn't responsible for Zac's death, or Serina's -- but, responsible or not, he blamed himself. And he was torturing himself because of it.

"A couple of sections ago, I seemed to somehow sense Zac's presence aboard the GALACTICA. I was talking to Boomer, and suddenly I knew Zac was there. I don't know how, or why. But it was Zac. I know it was.

Diana stared at him. He seemed so sure. But if Zac was dead -- Zac, who was so young, so enthusiastic, so alive...

"Then, a few days later, I sensed Zac again. The feeling was overwhelming, overpowering. But..."

Apollo shook his head, unable to go on. He didn't have to. Diana understood. "It wasn't your fault, Apollo," she said at last. "You know that. You couldn't have acted differently."

"Maybe. And maybe if I'd stayed with him, Zac would be alive today. And Serina..."

"I know, Apollo."

For a micron, he didn't believe her. He shook his head again, trying to deny her words.

"I do know," Diana insisted. "And if it'd been me, I'd probably feel about it exactly as you do."

Apollo sighed, then nodded slowly, thoughtfully. He knew her, knew her thoughts as he'd almost always done. He had to believe her.

"But that doesn't mean it's true," she continued. "That doesn't mean it really was your fault. There was nothing else you could have done. Nothing."

Diana's words were the key to a door Apollo had kept locked far too long. He sank to his knees, sobbing quietly, somehow at last free to truly mourn Zac, Serina, all the others he'd lost. Diana knelt beside him and took him in her arms, stroking his hair, trying to comfort him.

It was several long centons before he spoke again. "After what happened with Zac," he said at last, his voice low, unsteady, "I knew I had to try to reach Serina, to contact her again. It was nearly a yahren since she died. I... I went to the Commander's quarters, to his private journals. I was looking for any information on his experiments at the Military Institute..."

In another place, in other circumstances, Diana might have laughed. Apollo looked so embarrassed, so ashamed of what he'd done, like a little boy caught with his hand in a container of mushies. But there was nothing funny about the desperation that had driven him to violate Adama's private records.

"What experiments, Apollo?"

"Telepathy, telekinesis... I didn't really understand all of it. But I found what I was looking for, descriptions of rituals to contact the spirits of the dead -- if such a thing can truly be done. I thought then that..." He shrugged off the thought, whatever it was. "I followed the rituals carefully. The last thing I remember was sitting in my quarters, staring into a candle flame. Then I was here, trying to find Serina." He sighed. "But I can't find her, Diana. I've searched for what seems an eternity. And now I can't find the GALACTICA, either. I'm totally lost here. There's no way back. And somehow, I've drawn you into this, too. Gotten you trapped here..."

Diana knew he was afraid, and would never admit it. She was scared, too, because she was as lost as Apollo. And she still didn't know why she was there, or how she'd come to be there. Only that it was vitally important for the two of them to be together. Somehow, she knew that was what kept them both alive.

Apollo knew their danger. "Back aboard the GALACTICA," he said slowly, "I think I'm probably dying. I know somehow that if I can't get back, I will die. And if you stay here, you'll die, too."

Maybe that was the explanation. Maybe Apollo's need, his danger, had drawn her to him. Without some sort of link to the real world, he would die. And because of the peculiar psychic bond between them, Diana was that link.

"I'm sorry, Diana. I'd never knowingly have put you in danger. I love you far too much for that. But I've been so wrapped up in my own misery, I didn't think about anyone else. And now it's too late."

He kissed her, sadly, as if saying a final good-bye. Then, suddenly, he pushed her away, held her at arms' length. "No! By all the Lords, no! If we're still alive here, then we must still be alive in our own reality. And as long as we're alive, there's a chance we'll find a way out of here."

Diana nodded. She was still afraid, but something of Apollo's mood, his optimism, reached her through the fear. He really believed they had a chance to escape. There was hope in his eyes; it was no pretense.

Hand-in-hand, they started across the plain together, through the fog.

Then someone else was there with them. And then...

* * * * *

Diana woke in Life Centre, and the first thing she saw was Morgan's face, the worry in his eyes changing to relief as she smiled at him. "Morgan?"

"You scared us, Diana. All of us."

"What happened?"

"I had to break into your quarters. You were unconscious. That was two days ago."

"Two days! But..."

"Diana, you had a dream two days ago, just before that last Cylon attack. Do you remember it?"

"A dream?" She looked at him curiously. "Yes, I remember having one, but I don't remember any details. Why? And how do you know about it?"

Morgan took a deep breath, not sure how to go about telling her something he'd kept secret all his life. But it was time she knew, and it would help her understand what had happened to her, to them both. "That dream of yours must have occurred shortly after Apollo passed out in his quarters aboard the GALACTICA. But the danger to him wasn't great enough to keep you with him, not until much later, when he was near death. Then you were drawn to him again."

Stunned, Diana stared at him. "How could you possibly know...?"

"I followed you. When we brought you here, Dr. Senbi couldn't find anything wrong. I... I had to do something. So I got rid of the med techs, and I went after you."

She shook her head, bewildered. "Morgan, I don't understand..."

"I'm a telepath, Diana. I can read minds. That's how I know what happened to you. I had to try to bring you back." He took her hands, reluctant to meet her eyes. "I know I had no right, but..."

There was awe in Diana's eyes. She'd known Morgan for yahrens, but she didn't really know him at all... "Morgan, you saved us both. Without you, we'd have died. Neither of us could find a way back, and you..." Suddenly she threw her arms around him, hugged him fiercely. "You led us both home. And you say you had no right... You crazy, marvelous..."

"Shut up, Captain," he murmured, his lips against her hair.

"You..."

Morgan silenced her protest with a kiss that told them both far more than

words could.

DIANA'S JOURNAL

(Personal entry -- Voice code retrieval only.)

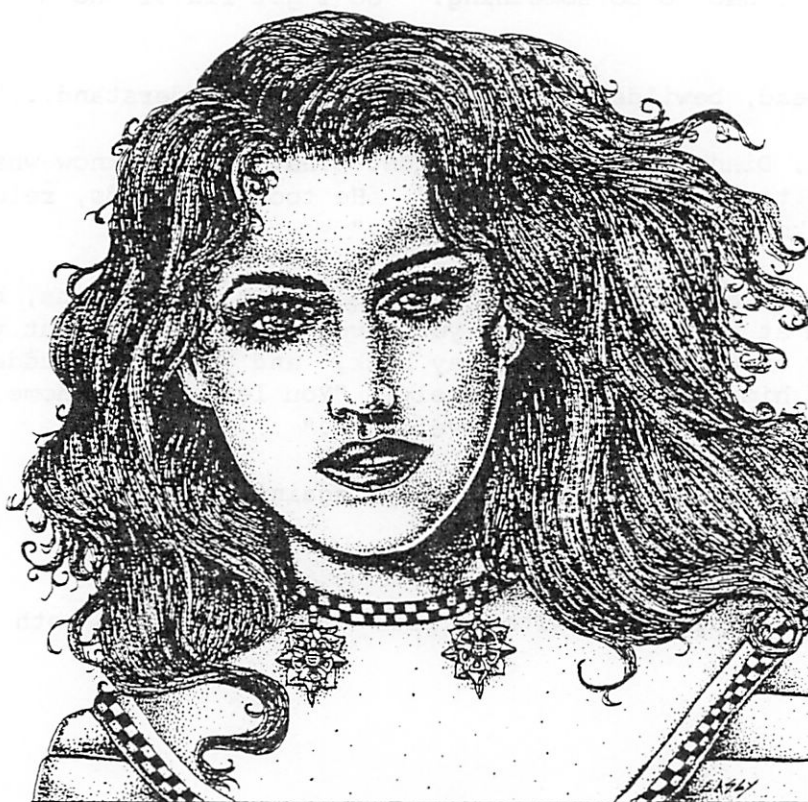
...Apollo's grief over Zac's death, then Serina's, and his guilt -- however unwarranted -- blocked everything else he might have felt this past yahren. I knew he was alive -- but until we met on that alien plain, he thought I must be dead. When he knew for certain I was still alive, he said he had something to live for...

He told me, just before Morgan led us home, that he wouldn't tell anyone about me, or about the OSIRIS. Anyone, that is, except the Commander. If word got out, there'd be many who'd want to hunt for the OSIRIS, or at least wait for her. And that is a risk we mustn't allow. If the Fleet slows down to wait, and if the Cylons find them...

But Adama will know we survived. He'll know we're searching for them. And he'll be able to leave subtle clues for us, too -- clues the Cylons won't be able to recognise.

The Commander will know -- as Apollo and Morgan and I know -- that eventually we'll find them.

And some day, I'll probably have to choose between Apollo and Morgan. I don't know if I want that day to ever come, because I don't know if I can do it. I think, in the end, I'll always love them both...



DIANA'S JOURNAL

(Personal entry -- Voice code retrieval only.)

Apollo told me so many things, I'm only just beginning to sort it all out...

There was a lot about himself and Starbuck and Boomer. The three of them have been so close for so long, it's difficult to imagine one without the others. Practical, level-headed Boomer, with a quiet wisdom all his own. And Starbuck, impulsive and irresponsible -- but never when it really matters. I've loved them both for as long as I've known them. There's no way to describe how I felt when Apollo told me they were both safe.

He told me a lot about Athena, too, and the Commander. Athena's still in love with Starbuck -- and he's more afraid of her than ever. And Adama. He has to bear the responsibility for the safety of the entire Fleet, for the last survivors of our worlds. Lords, how I wish there was some way I could help...

Three battlestars survived the holocaust -- the GALACTICA, the OSIRIS, and the PEGASUS -- although only the GALACTICA was present when the Cylons sprang their trap. I remember Commander Cain, and how Apollo used to practically worship him. Cain took the PEGASUS up against three base stars; Apollo said he destroyed two, and then the PEGASUS simply vanished. He thinks Cain's still alive, but said no one really agrees with him, not even Cain's daughter Sheba, who's aboard the GALACTICA now.

I met Sheba once, yahrens ago, on Caprica. She was something of a loner then, aloof and withdrawn; she was always talking about the marvelous, incomparable Cain. I feel sorry for her -- she's lost far more than I have.

Apollo told me a lot about Sheba; they've spent a good bit of time together. He's fond of her, but a little embarrassed -- and very afraid of hurting her. He said he thinks she's in love with him; from the way he described her behaviour, I'd have to agree with him. I hope for Sheba's sake she finds someone else to care for, because Apollo doesn't love her, at least not as she loves him and wants him to love her.

There was one thing Apollo told me that I think upset me even more than it did him, and in part it concerns Sheba. Sheba and a man -- only he wasn't really a man, wasn't really human -- who called himself Count Iblis.

Iblis enthralled Sheba, captivated the Council, nearly took command of the Fleet. Then he tried to kill Sheba, and Apollo...

Lyra's at the door. I'll have to finish later...

* * * * *

Lyra's finally left. She's been fussing over me all day -- worse than Ila

ever did! Morgan came while she was here, but we couldn't really talk. Lyra doesn't know what happened to me, and I don't want to tell her about it. It's far too personal...

But I need to talk to Morgan. He's shared so much of all this -- and I have to talk to someone. I need answers no computer can give.

I can't really say anything, even to Morgan, about Serina. That's something between Apollo and me, something that still hurts him far too deeply. But Zac, Starbuck, and the others...

And Count Iblis. Most of all, Iblis. I need to talk to someone about him. The experience that shook Apollo so badly -- just being told about it affected me as well. Because, somehow, I knew...

Apollo couldn't really tell me the details of what happened. He didn't know himself. He remembered challenging Iblis, whom he called the Prince of Darkness, Mephistopheles -- then, nothing. Starbuck told him Iblis killed him, and that strange beings aboard a fantastic "ship of lights" resurrected him again, saying they needed him alive.

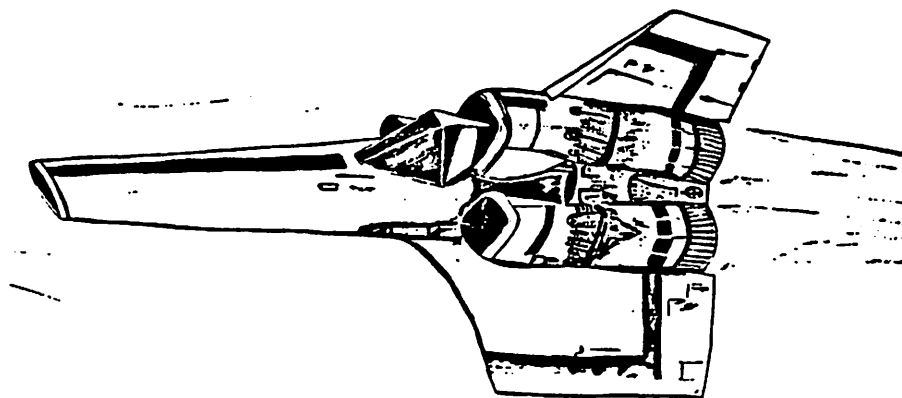
Apollo said he didn't really believe the story himself. Neither did I -- until he told me when it happened. That same day, sectors ago, when I nearly crashed... From what Apollo said, the time I was unconscious corresponds exactly to the interval Starbuck told Apollo he was "dead."

What does it mean? I don't know. Maybe it's further proof of the uncanny bond between Apollo and me, proof I'd know if anything ever happened to him. I can't explain it, and I'm not sure I even want to try.

But I do want to talk to Morgan about it. He understands so much...

Morgan... Lords, I've known him for yahrens! -- and I'm only just beginning to know him. A telepath? I never believed in that sort of thing before, but now I have to believe. And oddly enough, I'm not afraid. He thought I might be -- afraid, or maybe even horrified. But his being a telepath doesn't change his being Morgan. And it does help explain a lot of things. He's always known things he shouldn't, or more accurately couldn't, know. And he often does things that... He told me later he's also a telekineticist; he can move objects, manipulate them at a distance. He said he kept my Viper from crashing in the landing bay once -- that's how he crashed, not paying attention to his own ship.

Dear Morgan! He's remarkable, utterly fantastic. And I love him. How can anything about him possibly horrify me?





"Freya"

(By Lisa Golladay)

...three, four. Testing. One, two, THREE, FOUR -- CUT THE VOLUME, Burlington. Thank you. Testing once again until we get it right... Sarcasm? Burlington, you scum-licking, Cylon-brained frak-eater, when I want to be sarcastic, you'll know it. How's that? Great!

Personnel history update, Lieutenant Freya, Orange Squadron, battlestar OSIRIS. Subject: unconscionable and brutal termination of the life of a staff sergeant/comp tech, name unspecified, in the course of testing one of his half-cocked remote recording systems. Victim was found with three 90-erg microphones indelicately inserted in his respiratory passage...

Again!? For Sagan's sake...

Log update, semi-confidential status, Lieutenant Freya, unsung wizard of gonzo sentiology. Subject: understandable and very brutal termination of the life of... If you don't know what a gonzo sentiologist is, you don't deserve to, Burlington. Did that one work?

You're kidding! It works! Can I go now?

Yes, I'm busy tonight...and I'm busy tomorrow night. I'll ask Clem, maybe she's free.

...She is not bloodthirsty, she's a sweet little bastling, and... Well, you don't really have to run away screaming, but the gesture's appreciated. Good-bye, Burlington.

CLICK.

I leave the above silliness on tape because it's not worth the effort to back up and erase it. Besides, it saves me from entering a description of Burlington's daggitting in this journal. I've switched this contraption to local and left the com unplugged, so no one else can call with other excuses.

It occurs to me that the OSIRIS's data banks are full of nonsense about me, and I want to get the truth on record somewhere. For instance, I am at present twenty-four yahrens old, not twenty-seven. I have never graduated from the Gemini Preparatory Academy; indeed, I'm not aware such a school ever existed -- which is of course why I'm on record as having graduated from there. I have never broken an engagement to be sealed, because I have never been engaged, and my first bast, Elidor, was not a purebred Scorpian Shorthair. I don't know what breed he was, because I stole him before obtaining his pedigree. And when I left Narwal Anti-Raider Base to join the OSIRIS crew, the men on that remote post did not have a prize of 75 cubits for the first man to maneuver me into bed. By then, the pot had reached an even 100 cubits.

I suppose I should dive right in. I was born in Kimbolt City, chief port for Gemini's Northwest Quad. I had then, and still retain, grey eyes, fair skin, and brown hair in greater than usual quantity. Father was an outlaw techie, last heard from eleven yahrens ago on a clandestine solar collector orbiting Virgon. Mother was a socialator who settled down as a teacher of history and drama at Kimbolt Square University. Her friends included famous authors, actors, historians, sentiologists, and Warriors, many former clients. My brother and sister and I would accompany her to Kimbolt City's best -- if overlooked by the guidebooks -- military bar, the Viper Pit. When Mother and little Kyfri died in a Cylon attack that also destroyed our home, I naturally made the Viper Pit my new residence.

I was nine. My brother Mord had already graduated from the Tauran Academy and was assigned to the battlestar PEGASUS. His brilliant career was soon sidelined by his persistent belief that inanimate objects -- chairs, shoes, asteroids -- were Cylon spies. Commander Cain tolerated his occasional outbursts and quietly replaced the furniture and equipment Mord destroyed during his worst outbursts. Mord was, after all, a master of all forms of explosive weaponry. But when my poor brother started bombing an M4 main sequence star with five planets "back into the pre-stellar nebula, the bastard!" Cain bowed to the inevitable and had him committed.

So the pilots who frequented the Viper Pit were my only family. I waited tables, dealt pyramid, washed floors and dishes, and dodged representatives of the Gemini Department of Welfare, who wanted to put me in a foster home. I could find my own homes, thank you. I excelled in school, mostly to spite the bureaucrats and partly to please Rek. Rek owned the Pit and had tended bar for thirty-five yahrens. He looked like a grey bear and wrote bad limericks. Awful limericks. I remember once... No, never mind. After a few yahrens, the GDW's stopped hanging around, and Rek kept the bar and me, and I learned to play the meanest game of table triad on the inner planets.

Well, anyway, I was sixteen and entering my last yahren in public school when I had to leave planet the first time. I was walking through a suburban park, historical site of the first planetary capital, when a grey animal with white paws and torn ears crawled out from under a bush, sat in my path, and said -- this is a near approximation -- "Murrarraow!" I recognised a half-grown bast, poorly fed and wary.

Now, I should point out that basts and other carnivorous domestic animals are illegal in that part of Gemini, a judicial relic of an old, hyper-religious ruling class which enforced vegetarianism in everybody, human or not. Only trained support animals -- seeing-eye daggits, sentiological animals, etc. -- were allowed. I'd met two or three basts before, all belonging to my mother's professional friends. She'd pointed them out, saying I was named after a founding Lord who travelled with several basts. The unescorted bast fascinated me. Besides, his distrust of people seemed highly unorthodox.

I knelt to the bast's level and extended my hand; he approached, and I saw him limp. His nose and my finger touched as an angry voice bellowed, "Elidor! Elidor, damned bast! Get over here!" The bast slipped away, and I watched him slink toward a small man carrying a map, a trowel, and an armload of artifacts -- a sentiological poacher, combing the site of the old capital for any possibly saleable relics.

"Damned bast, get back to work!" He kicked the animal several feet eastward, and the bast began searching. It was obviously hurt, mistreated, malnourished -- and friendless. I did the only thing I could -- I went home and forgot about it. I had no inclination to absorb someone else's troubles.

Since it so thoroughly changed my life, I've often wondered why I returned to that park the following day. I found myself behind the same bush shortly after dawn, waiting centars until the poacher and his bast appeared. The bast wisely went to work; only when his master paused for lunch did Elidor approach me. I stroked his fur; he rubbed his head against mine. His master called, "Elidor!" The bast left the bush's shadows and faced his owner.

"Get back here! Get!"

The bast turned. He bolted. He landed in my lap. The poacher rose to pursue as Elidor's claws embedded themselves in my blouse. I turned and bolted.

The three of us -- Elidor doing none of the legwork, seeing as how he was still wrapped around my neck -- raced through the park, out of the suburb, and past the city limits before I finally lost the newly-robbed sentiologist. Unfortunately, half the city must have heard his complaints about, "My bast! My expensive bast! She stole my bast!" I sneaked to the Viper Pit via alleys and sidestreets, only once being stopped by an Elder.

"You, girl, where are you going with that bast?"

"To my assigned departure location, sir. My expedition leaves tonight."

His eyes narrowed. "You're a sentiologist?"

"Well... A very young one..."

I reached comparative safety just before first sundown. Some pilots were already settled in -- the Pit was never empty. I spotted some buddies.

"Harb! Daystar! How'd you like some hitchhikers?"

I'd been thinking that yahren about my future, you see. I knew I couldn't stay at the Pit all my life -- I couldn't have proven anything that way. I'd considered writing, sold some blaster-and-sorcery stuff, and contemplated the military. Since I could already play pyramid...

So it wasn't really that drastic when I asked Daystar to leave me at the Caprican Academy.

Surprisingly, Rek was furious. But when he stopped railing and cursing, he emptied the safe and cash register, gave me the money, and told me I could pay it back in bar tabs when I became a pilot. I started to say good-bye, but I had to get going, and the bar was busy, and...

Well, I was deposited on the landing field of the Caprican Military Academy at the age of sixteen, with one bast, three hundred cubits, no diploma, and a first-class head for pyramid. All proved useful.

My first attempts at an admissions interview met stony resistance; waiting lists at the Academy in those days stretched several yahrens. Finally, I used my last cubits to purchase a haircut, a briefcase, and the slinkiest black dress available in a large, cosmopolitan city attached to a major military installation. I'd grown from a mousy child to a mousy young woman, but attitude conquers all. Elidor and I marched into the Chief Admissions Officer's office. Within half a centon, I had him convinced I was nineteen and a graduate cum laude -- summa would have been pushing it -- of the prestigious -- if small and obscure -- Gemini Northwest Prep, which was unfortunately destroyed in a Cylon raid, leaving no records intact. My major? Sentiology, of course. What else?

So I took placement tests in math, science, composition, and social sciences, passing all. The Admissions Officer called me back, offering to add me to the waiting list. At that point, I gave him his first dose of truth, telling him I was orphaned, nearly broke, and new to the planet. Waiting for even a few sectons would be difficult, if not impossible. The officer made a few whispered calls, ruffled some papers, and stared at me. Again. He seemed fond of that -- the dress was a good investment.

"Do you really have a degree in sentiology?" he asked.

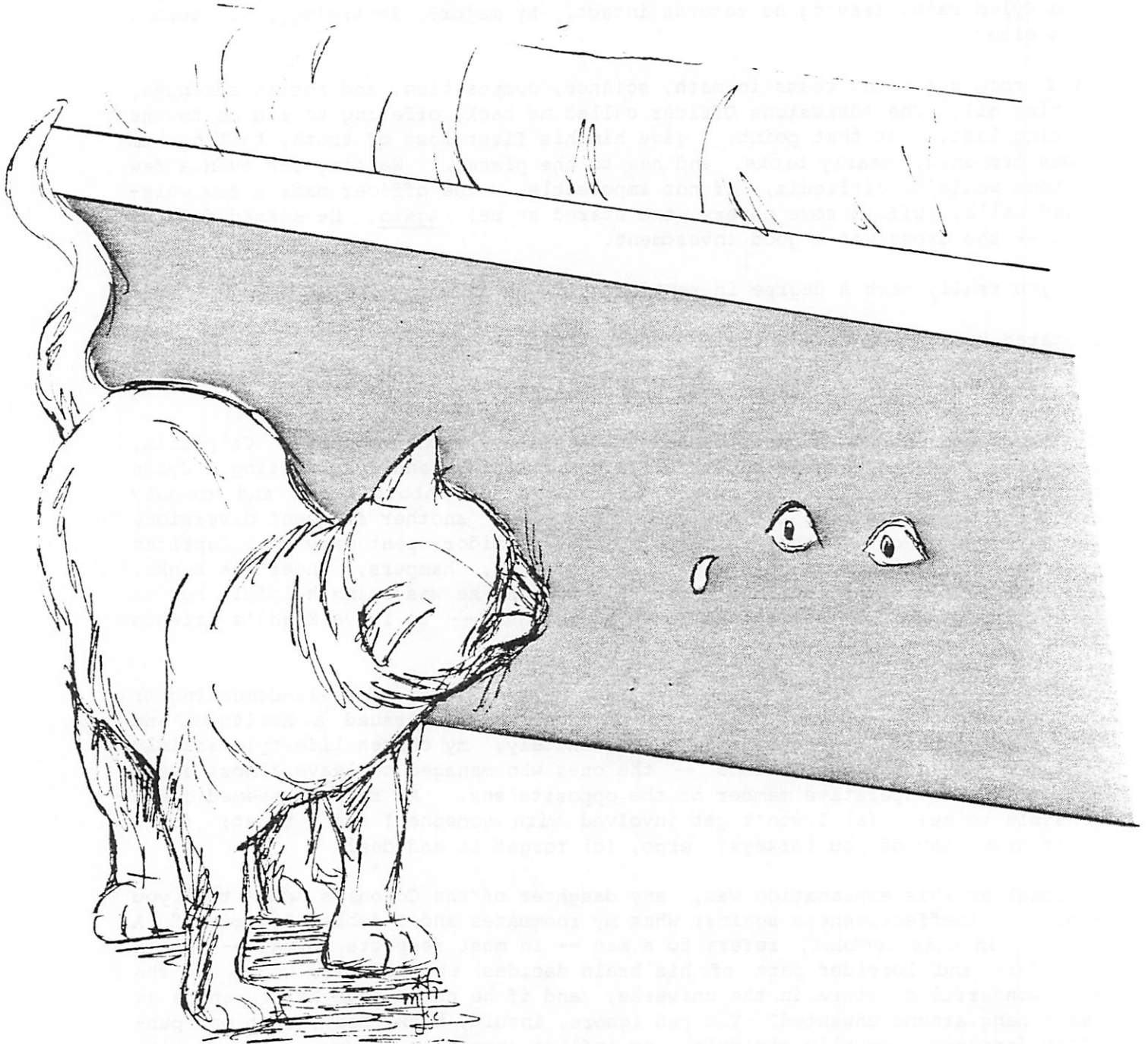
I stared back. "I have a trained bast, don't I?"

I entered the Caprican Academy one secton later.

My first yahrens as a cadet passed uneventfully. One roommate, Calpernia, steadfastly buried herself in study, flight training, and Cylon hating. Cylon hating was a favourite Academy sport, ranking just above triad and roughly even with prank plotting and ale chugging. Sex, another frequent diversion, was a favourite of my other roommate, Eiand. Elidor spent many cool Caprican evenings sniffing out Eiand's lovers from closets, hampers, under the bunks, etc. during flash inspections. Poor Elly thought he was being helpful, but we finally convinced him -- thanks to a squirt gun -- to leave Eiand's friends alone.

I shied away from such hobbies, seeing as they were all self-demeaning or downright dangerous, emotionally or physically. I pursued a healthful and beneficial pastime -- pyramid. Unfortunately, my chosen lifestyle solidly confused most of my compatriots -- the ones who managed to leave almost every game with a cooperative member of the opposite sex. My reasons seemed quite sensible to me: (a) I won't get involved with someone I can't trust; (b) I don't trust any of you turkeys; ergo, (c) forget it and deal.

Rational as this explanation was, any daughter of the Colonies will tell you about its ineffectiveness against what my roommates and I dubbed "daggits." A daggit, in this context, refers to a man -- in most respects normal -- who in some dark and lopsided part of his brain decides a particular woman is the most wonderful creature in the universe, and if he can't have her, can he at least hang around unwanted? You can ignore, insult, kick, beat, spit on, publicly denounce, cruelly ridicule, or inflict permanent injury upon a daggit, and his only response will be to offer to pay for your dinner. Daggits have limpid, adoring eyes, bottomless wallets, and thick skins. They cannot be driven off. They can only be stalled or diverted.



I go into such lurid detail because of the events I am soon to relate. For most of my time at the Academy, daggits were occasional annoyances. Pesty, but unimportant. I studied, trained, wrote, played pyramid, learned a bit about Caprica, and pried Elidor off Eiland's boyfriends. Then, midway through my senior yahren, I received a notice from the Office of Grades and Records.

"Congratualtions, Cadet Freya. You have completed all Academy requirements and are in the top 10% of your class. You have the option of continuing elective studies here at the Academy, or of applying for intern duty at a defence post of your choosing. Please inform our office of your decision within eleven days of the date marked at the top of this notice."

Naturally, the date marked at the top of that notice had passed three days before. All 10% of us got extensions, and I applied for duty at the anti-Raider base at Narwal. Narwal was the most strategically important base on Caprica, located where magnetic field patterns allowed interplanetary craft to enter the planet's atmosphere with least interference. It was also, as it turned out, one of the most isolated places on Caprica. And, as I learned after my assignment, I was the only woman cadet.

Total staff at the base was one hundred twenty-two; twelve of those were interns. We twelve, who lived in separate quarters, were nominally divided into two shifts of six each. By our second week, the de facto structure was three shifts of four -- one shift on patrol, one shift sleeping, and one shift playing pyramid. Narwal became the site of Caprica's premier military card game and host to dedicated gamers of all ranks and services, thanks mostly to my (humble) skills as gamemaster. Meanwhile, I dodged steamy cadets and often steamier senior officers.

Most annoying were a poetic lieutenant named Dormit (who thought my hair extensive enough to hold "all the flowers of Elysium"), a sincere but dense cadet called Spigot (who adored my blue eyes. My eyes are grey. He said they were blue. I said they were grey. He said they were blue. It stalled him.), two med techs, a senior maintenance crewman obsessed with obscure pre-modern dramatic literature, and a hot-shot Viper trainee named Valmeron, who followed me to Narwal. Valmeron was a bit less soupy-brained than the others, and he might have gotten somewhere if his test Viper hadn't lost an engine bolt during takeoff one rainy and already miserable day.

It was too bad to lose Valmeron, but worse to regain Priam. Priam, in the top 11% of his class, showed up unannounced to replace Valmeron, thanks no doubt to his own unrelenting daggitting of yours truly and the intervention of his father, Sire Ceon. Priam was a society boy, well stocked with money, influence, social charm, and the irrational belief that one Cadet Freya was born to become his adoring companion.

He left flowers in my Viper. He brought lobster for Elidor. Lobster! He wrote violently purple prose featuring a thinly-disguised me -- and published it! I once poured an entire goblet of sparkling ambrosia down the front of his pants three microns before he spoke at a base debriefing. After the debriefing, the most memorable ever, he said he wasn't angry -- he knew I only did it because I loved him.

Priam's daggitting had almost reached critical mass by the end of that last

semester. An explosion was imminent, and dear Priam would have suffered some great -- as yet undevised -- comeuppance if the Academy headmaster hadn't summoned me back. Seems he'd heard about rather undisciplined activities at Narwal.

Elidor and I arrived at the Academy half a section later. I ran into Eiand outside the Administration Building.

"Freya! Good to see you! Congratulations!"

"For what?" I asked, but she'd already gone. I resolved to find her again later, then reported to the headmaster's overfurnished office.

"Umm, Cadet Freya, I have received reports of, umm, rather, uh, nonmilitary activity at Narwal. I was hoping you would, uh, perhaps enlighten me as to the nature of these, uh, activities."

What activities, sir?" I leaned forward. Elidor purred.

"Well, I... There are reports of incessant, uh, gambling, drinking, partying, umm, wrestling, deception of officers, uh..."

"Sir?"

"Wha...? Yes, Cadet Freya?"

"I can assure you there has been no deception of officers, sir. We invite everyone to play."

Headmaster Pratt's momentary relief shattered.

"Well, that's, uh, commendable, I'm sure. But then, there's this business of, well, a wager."

"A wager, sir? But isn't gambling prohibited on military property?" The headmaster had very little hair left, but I think I saw several more strands turn grey. These administrative types are very easily confused.

"Yes, of course, it is, you're right, Cadet. But... But, as I understand it, there's something of a wager on... That is to say, there's a betting pool on, well, surely you know..."

"Sir?" My mother taught me how to portray innocence on stage -- mostly a matter of eye-width and purity of gaze. Mom taught well.

"I'm told there's a betting pool on which cadet will woo you into bed," Pratt finally spat out. "That is, as I needn't tell you, most unorthodox."

I looked innocent. Elidor looked innocent. My dress uniform, a bit tight across the chest, did what little it could.

"Sir," I inquired, "are you saying it is the policy of the Military Academy on Caprica that I accept their advances?"

"No, no, of course not, certainly not, no, no, indeed..." Pratt's potato-like head reddened stupendously. "Nothing of the sort. It's just... Well... Cadet, you are dismissed."

He rose and saluted. I did the same and left. Too bad -- that conversation would have been fun to continue. As I passed the reception secretary, he called out, "Cadet Freya! Congratulations on your sealing!"

"On my what!?" I wheeled, dove for the secretary's desk, and confronted the startled corporal. "Sealing? What sealing?"

"Oh, it's all over the planet! Quite a catch, too. Oh, I get it, you thought Priam's family wouldn't announce it, didn't you?"

I was calm. Seething, but calm. "Let me see a newstape."

The obliging corporal presented a day-old crystal of the Caprica Suns-Bugle. I tossed it into the reader, paged to the society news, and read:

"COUNCILMAN'S SON, CADET TO SEAL. Cadet Priam, son of Councilman Sire Ceon, and Cadet Freya, both seniors at the Military Academy of Caprica, will seal this summer..."

"That snake!" I said. "That wretched, frak-sucking, underhanded little snake!" I stormed out of the building, Elidor following, confused but loyal.

A group of young cadets who clustered outside pointed at me and stared. I was something of a celebrity. This was intolerable. I fumed past, plotting mayhem. I would have to kill the little frimp. I could find accomplices. It would have to be a slow, painful execution, preferably public. Perhaps some acid... I mused like that for several centons before almost colliding with a bulletin board. Prominently posted was a large four-colour announcement:

VOLUNTEERS WANTED -- DEEP STAR EXPLORATION

Warrior/scientists needed aboard battlestar OSIRIS for two-yahren expedition to unknown space. Hazardous but rewarding experience. The OSIRIS will ship out in two sectars. To join her, contact Commander Christopher or the Academy Recruiting Office. All inquiries handled in strictest confidence.

That last part appealed to me.

When I returned to Narwal the following morning, Priam asked me about my trip. He wanted all the details. All of them.

"What's to say, Priam? It was completely uneventful. Headmaster Pratt gave me an inconsequential warning, and I caught the next flight back."

"But what about that afternoon? Did you see anybody? What about Calpernia and Eiand?"

"Oh, I ran into Eiand. She's doing great, expects a commission aboard the GALACTICA any section now."

"That's all? No other topics?"

"No. Why? Should there have been?"

Priam entered a Grand Sulk. Nobody in the Twelve Worlds can sulk as thoroughly as Priam. He sulked all the way through our remaining days at Narwal. He sulked during graduation ceremonies. He sulked through the reception that followed. He sulked until, near the punch bowl, he overheard Commander Christopher of the OSIRIS welcome me under his command.

"Freya," Priam bubbled, "you never told me you'd been commissioned! Congratulations!" Then, to the Commander, "Where will the OSIRIS be stationed during this next yahren?"

"We're shipping out in twelve centars," Christopher replied. "Deep star exploration, you know. Won't be back for two yahrens."

Panic was rising in Priam. I had to move fast.

"Well, Commander," Priam sputtered, "is there any room for other recent graduates aboard your ship?"

"Eiand!" I called. "Eiand! Over here! I've found him!"

The Commander smiled. "Why, yes, the OSIRIS has plenty of..."

Eiand, bless her soul, understood the urgency in my voice and hurried over.

"Eiand," I cooed, "remember, you were looking for Priam a few centars ago? Well, you're lucky I spotted him so soon! Why don't you take him outside now, while there's nothing important going on here?"

My old roommate and I had been through this before. She grabbed Priam and dragged him from the reception, with him squirming and protesting every micron. I wish I knew what she did with him outside, but she kept him long enough. I turned back to Commander Christopher. He was downing a toasted mushie. How could I possibly explain my circumstances to him?

Just then, I spotted a tall blonde woman -- Flight Commander Lyra of the OSIRIS. We'd never met. I couldn't think of a better occasion to remedy that. "Colonel Lyra? My name's Freya. I just signed aboard the OSIRIS, and I have to talk to you."

I told her my story. I knew she'd understand.

"Captain Diana! I think there's someone here you'll get along with," she called to a redhead in the corner. "I'll go have a talk with the Commander," she told me. She tried hard not to smile, but failed.

Some day, I'll ask her exactly what she told Commander Christopher, but I never saw my "intended husband" again.

And that is why Elidor and I joined the OSIRIS. Now, if only I could find a way to avoid the daggits here...



DIANA'S JOURNAL

(Personal entry -- Voice code retrieval only.)

Our medical staff confined me to quarters for three days after my peculiar psychic encounter with Apollo, afraid my experience -- which they don't know anything about -- might have some side effects. Thank the Lords, two of those days are gone. I've had a lot of time to think, and to remember...

Fortunately, my friends have been seeing to it that I'm not bored. Laia, who commands Orange Squadron, has been to see me several times; last night, she brought Freya and Pandora with her -- and a couple of bottles of ambrosia. Arion was here, too, along with most of the rest of my squadron. And, of course, Morgan. He's been here so much, you'd almost think he's moved in. We had quite a party going for a while.

Commander Christopher and Major Meret came a couple of centars ago, with Meret acting even more motherly than Lyra usually does. Which is understandable, I suppose, since Meret and Christopher are expecting their first child soon. The Commander, who was quite genuinely concerned about me, couldn't help beaming every time he looked at his wife.

And I swear Lyra's dropped in every time she's had a free centon. This last time, she came to ask me to keep an eye on Arion after I return to duty. She's worried about him, which is natural. If there's a way to get into mischief, to turn a simple mission into near-disaster, Arion'll find it. He attracts trouble the way Starbuck always did.

Come to think of it, there's a good bit of Starbuck in our young survivor from the COLUMBIA. Maybe that's why Lyra's so attracted to him. She's in love with him, I think -- Starbuck, that is -- or with a memory of him. I'm not sure which, and I don't suppose it matters. Starbuck will never change; he'll always be Starbuck.

We were very close once, Starbuck and I, and we'll always be good friends. It's almost impossible not to like him -- and maybe that's why nearly everyone likes Arion, too. Including -- maybe especially -- Lyra.

Anyway, imagine -- me playing guardian angel! And especially to Arion! Apollo always teased me about my temper; he said it went well with my hair. And I used to throw things at him whenever he said it, too. And now Lyra wants me to watch over a younger version of Starbuck. I'm afraid she's handed me a nearly full-time job.

Maybe I can get Morgan to help...

Trouble is, if I do, who in Hades is going to protect the OSIRIS from the two of them?



Season's Greetings from the
Battlestar Galactica

Artis 1980

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DIANA'S JOURNAL

(Personal entry -- Voice code retrieval only.)

Well, I've done it again, gotten myself in trouble -- and, this time, with practically all the authorities on board.

I made it halfway through that third day the medical staff ordered me confined to quarters, which is pretty good, actually. Normally, I'd have been clawing the walls by the end of the first day. But, as Morgan observed -- accurately, as usual -- I was pretty exhausted. And I had a lot to think about, too. But today was simply too much to endure. I felt fine -- and I was bored...

When the alert sounded, I did what I normally do -- I raced for my Viper. From what little information we were getting in the launch bay, the OSIRIS was facing the full force of a base star -- four squadrons of Raiders. We needed every pilot we had.

My engines were already running when Lyra noticed. "Diana! What in Hades do you think you're doing? Get back to quarters!"

I ignored her.

"That's an order, Captain!"

"Blast it, Lyra! I'm the best pilot aboard this ship. You need me..."

"Precisely! We need you -- alive. The medical staff confined you to quarters for a reason. Now, get out of here and... Diana!"

That's when I launched.

They were right -- there were four squadrons out there. We were hopelessly outnumbered, but our pilots have always been able to fly circles around the Cylons. I remember Apollo saying that without ten to one odds the Cylons can't win -- and the odds weren't quite ten to one.

I don't think I've ever flown better. Lyra kept telling me to get back aboard the OSIRIS, and I kept replying that I couldn't hear her -- and I kept right on firing. Unlike the last time, I didn't miss, not once. My Viper became an extension of my own body, my own will. We were one, fighting to survive. And survive we did -- but the Cylons didn't.

When the last remaining Cylons fled, I turned back to the OSIRIS. And, although I'm sure Lyra won't believe it, I felt wonderful. I waited until the rest of my squadron had landed. We'd lost only one ship, a young pilot from Green Squadron.

My landing was perfect; my reception was anything but. I was ordered to re-

port to the Commander. Christopher was waiting for me -- and so were Lyra and Colonel Tyr. All three were furious.

Several very long centons later, I was able to escape. Fortunately, all I got was a lecture on obeying orders, and a very strict reprimand. It could have been much worse.

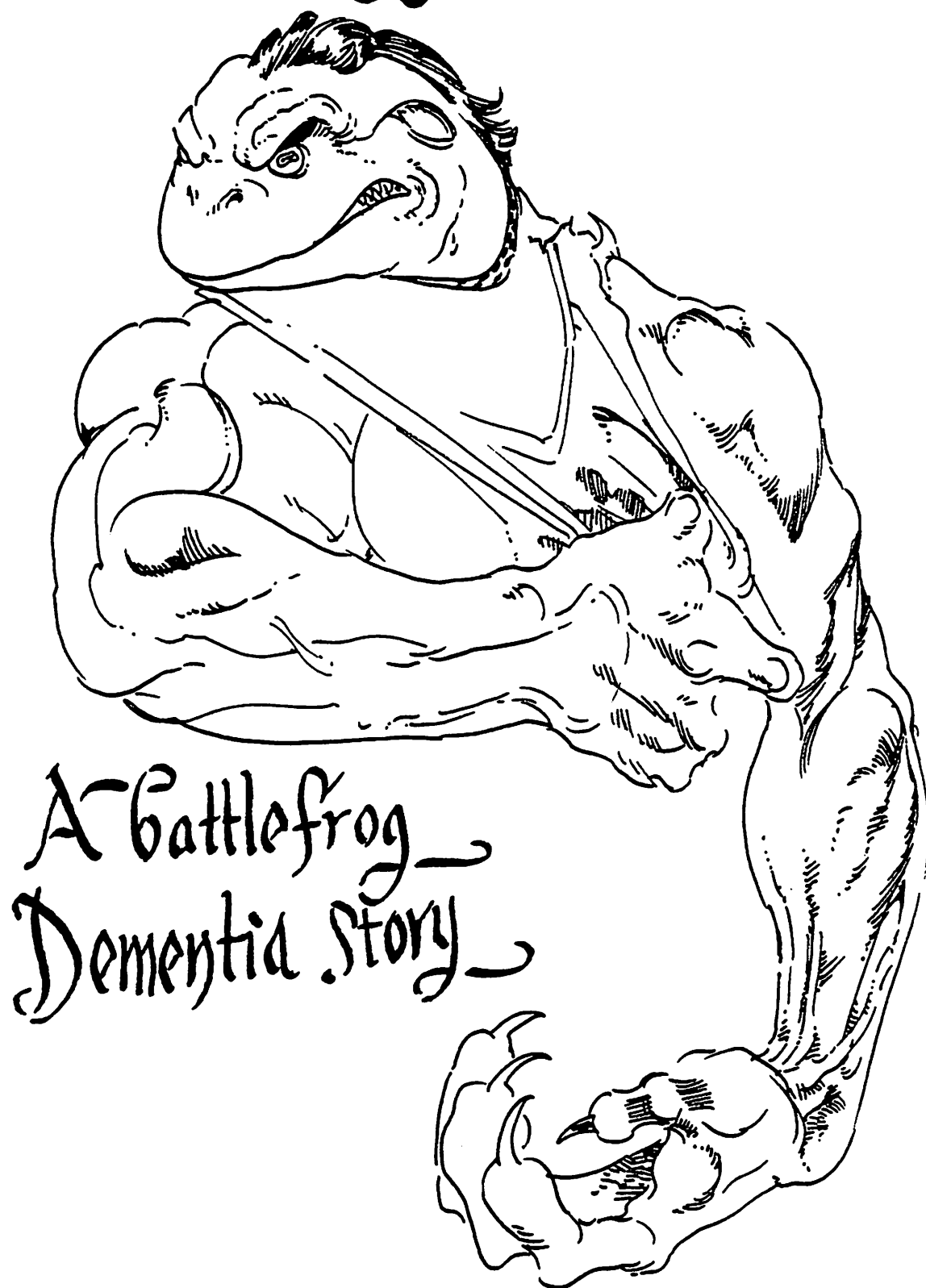
I was still too wound up to simply return to my quarters, so I headed for the Officers' Club. Maybe I could find Morgan, and we...

I walked into the midst of a victory celebration -- and suddenly found myself the heroine of the day. Like Apollo and Morgan, I dislike being the centre of attention, but there was no way to escape. Arion saw me enter, and he yelled my name -- and I was engulfed by a swarm of jubilant Warriors.

I think I gave in gracefully. Anyway, it was a great party...



frogula



A Battlefrog
Dementia Story

"Frogula"

(By Robert Smerp)

"ALL HANDS. GENERAL QUARTERS. GENERAL QUARTERS. WE ARE SINKING. REPEAT, ALL HANDS, GENERAL QUARTERS AND FLOODING STATIONS. WE ARE SINKING. THAT IS ALL."

Commander Morpheus, now in command of the good (?) ship DEMENTIA, last of the Colonies' Batrachian-class battlestars, rose slowly to a sitting position on his bunk. He stared at the cheerily-blinking red G.Q. warning light on the bulkhead and stared even harder at his bedside repeater screen. "Flooding stations? Flooding stations? On a battlestar? Parsecs from the nearest planet? Flooding stations?"

He levered himself out of the bunk and shook himself awake. The out-of-fashion decadent opulence of the furnishings still seemed wrong to him. Commanders didn't need satin draperies and gold commode seats. The thick padding under the Varpian spider-silk shag rugs, those he could go for. The deep-padded armchairs and the small swimming pool, those he could also go for. But that commode seat was cold...

He trundled to the desk com and pressed the go button. "Command deck," he demanded.

Nothing.

"Command deck!"

Still nothing.

Muttering to himself, he activated the ship's internal view scanners. All he could see was rain. Rain? On the command deck?"

He threw on his glitzy blue metallic command suit and checked the built-in air recycler and life support pack on his belt, then hit the trigger and felt the breathing bubble pop out of his collar and tentatively settle over his head. All systems seemed go.

He stalked to the armoured door of his suite and started to open it. Faintly, by conduction, he could hear rain pattering on the other side of the portal.

Instead of opening the hatch, he turned and padded to the emergency systems override control console, discreetly hiding inside an antique roll-top desk. Rain, no. Intraship fire extinguishing system, yes. Just override the thing, see what triggered it off, and correct that. Then back into the bunk for a couple more centars' sleep.

He allowed his bubble to retract, then grabbed the desk handle and lifted. And lifted. And...

"Stuck," he muttered to himself. He thumbed the lock, cleverly disguised as a cupid's tummy, and waited for the cherub's eyes to glow green in acceptance. They glowed, and he tried again. Still nothing. "Felgercarb!"

The Commander hauled out his megablaster, thumbed it to narrow beam, and took aim at the control console. As he was about to hit the trigger, the top gently rolled up and back into the body of the desk. It then sat there, gently bleeping and tootling, waiting for him to do something.

"Unique. Utterly unique. Strange was to rig a person identifier." The family of Morpheus, it seemed, had remarkably short tempers.

He thumbed the status check buttons and waited for a full readout. Ah! Fire on the landing deck. He scanned the landing deck, while cancelling the fire fighting equipment. What he saw was a luau.

The landing deck was not only covered with miscellaneous fighters in various stages of repair; it also seemed to be littered with bodies. Warrior bodies. Spiflicated Warrior bodies. And whole, roast, synthetic hoguloid carcasses (or the remains thereof), and open 50-gallon drums of...ambrosia? The Engineer must have been busy with the synthesizers again. Morpheus watched, fascinated, as fire from the heap of (synthetic) logs in the middle of the landing bay spat out a horde of sparks which then settled into a drum of ambrosia. The ambrosia caught fire. "Good stuff," muttered the Commander, then noticed that the landing bay was completely dry.

Checking his board, he found the fire sensors had been cut off in there -- or rather, the effectors, the fire drencher heads and pumps. So when the protection sensors cut in, the rest of the ship tended to flood, while the landing bay, now with two burning drums of ambrosia, stayed dry.

Grinning evilly, Morpheus overrode the overrides. The deluge heads happily began to flood the bay and awaken the snoring crew. And two very specific foamers doused the drums of flaming booze.

"Have a party and not invite your loving Commander, will you? Ha!" He cut off the fire protection equipment and started the sump pumps. When the indicators showed flooding below the level of the airtight hatch opening, he left the systems to fend for themselves and went back to the console for the Command Override Package, which he clipped to his belt -- just in case. With that, he could control most of the vital functions of the ship as well as if he was on the bridge, or at his own suite's console.

As he stepped into the corridor, a horrible wet smell assailed his nose. Vaguely steaming, the centuries-old "rug" on the floor of the corridor exuded an odour with all the charm and vitality of a long-dead swamp. The miasma curled upward as the heating elements in the floor tried to dry the place out, and only succeeded in fermenting the mass. He sneezed violently. The smell was no worse than the swamps of home, or the planet of Sumatr-Alpha.

"Good old Sumatr-Alpha." He'd been stuck there four long, fragrant, and dank yahrens while nominally in charge of a small detect-and-destroy base. During the whole four yahrens, he'd had one whole raid, and that had been only two lost Cylons who thought good old Alph was one of their bases.



Unfortunately for all concerned, the radar control officer, somewhat unused to military emergencies, thought the Cylons were one of the base's own patrols. He'd guided them into a landing bay for refueling and maintenance and didn't notice anything amiss, even after they landed, until he saw the maintenance techs running for their lives. While the Cylons wrestled with automatic refueling equipment that was trying to stuff Viper fuel into some random orifice of the Cylon ships, the base came to a quivering alert. In the ensuing fire-fight, the Cylons were wiped out, the landing bay reduced to rubble, four Warriors extinguished, and the base made a shambles. Fortunately, the auto refueling equipment was so tightly wrapped around the Cylon ships that they couldn't take off.

Surprisingly, Morpheus remained in command after the debacle. Supreme Command probably searched for a total hole to transfer him to for punishment, and kept coming up with Sumatr-Alpha. It's taken an act of Ghod (Morpheus's uncle) to finally get him assigned to a ship -- the ill-fated corvette now residing in the landing bay.

From swamp to turkey shoot to swamp, this one mobile. The rugs were really steaming now, and Morpheus was getting dizzy. Not sick-dizzy, just mentally floating, feeling rather detached. Like the mind trance of the Rites of Change back home.

Now, there was a cheerful thought. The Commander could just imagine the reaction from the less mentally stable of the ship's complement if they found out about the Commander's Were heritage.

Morpheus's ancestors were odd in many ways. One of the oddest ways related to their one-time try at breeding for polymorphing abilities. A whole bunch of generations were tinkered with -- genetically -- in the attempt. And a few people made it.

Just present the proper stimuli and watch the tinkered Warriors turn into something different. Due to the swampy nature of the world of its breeding, the line of Morpheus tended to polymorph into -- frogs? Well, batrachians, anyway. Glistening skin, vestigial gills burgeoning, webs spreading between fingers and toes, oculars enlarging to gather more light, jaw enlarging for massive biting power -- the Warriors would become their Were-selves.

"Frogs?" muttered the geneticists, and gave up. The mutation was permanent, dominant, and non-lethal. The geneticists were trying for something a bit more showy, like a dragon, wolf, or schleema form. The frogular nature of their results annoyed them. Secretly, it delighted the Warrior ancestors. Pound for pound, the batrachians of their world were the most voracious, ferocious, indestructible form of life extant. The monster Monitor frogs of the equatorial swamps could take on a battle tank -- and win.

Morpheus remembered his days as a trainee in the Were business -- long hours undergoing deep hypnosis to implant the safeguards for his sanity; pain unending, as his body fought to change from what it was to something not meant to exist; weeks of grey mental haze while brain and mind fought for understanding and rational control. He remembered his first clear memories in Were form. He was in a haze, and the haze parted to reveal a swamp. He contemplated it for a timeless period, as self, as identity slowly flowed back into his ex-

hausted brain.

He was attacked. In the primeval swamps of home, he was turned loose to wander, gain control of his new form, and become once again a thinking creature. Some Were did not return to their home halls. Some died under the muddy waters or in the jaws of other predators. Some were attacked by hunting wild-basts. As he was attacked.

Now, a man/frog has limits. The frogular part has mighty powers, while the man has brilliance. Separately, each was fairly helpless; neither had spent a full life as a frog. But, with sectars of mnemonic training, engram grafting, and DNA conditioning, the combination was appalling. As a man, or a brute batrachian, he would have died then and there. As a true Were Warrior, fully in charge of his immensely powerful body and Warrior mind, he ripped the four hundred pound bast to bloody froth, then ate the jucier parts -- raw, of course.

The way the war was progressing, he may very well be the last of the line. The DEMENTIA was on its way to his home. There could easily be Were in the swamps, who would survive even if the planet was attacked.

Yuck! What a smell! Morpheus was very thankful the other key elements of the Change were missing. The mental patterns were very specific, and keyed to the moons of home. Generally invisible through the soup his world used for an atmosphere, they made a fairly safe trigger. The few times a Were Warrior came into a multi-moon system for R-and-R could be trying, however. Full moons were never popular with them.

His wanderings took him into the entrance of the astronomy display dome, used for navigation (theoretically), instruction (infrequently), and necking (quite often). As he entered the dome, he saw an odd formation of ranked red stars, rather lower than he remembered the dome going. Red stars that seemed to drift left, right, left, right, left... He could feel himself getting dizzy again.

Red dots? Sliding to left and right? Cylons?

"Are you ready for your class, students?" a dulcet feminine voice whispered from out of the darkness. "Good. Then I shall begin."

The ship's astronomometer! Of course! That redheaded lady who was so morose until the day she found the dome and started to give lectures, very competent and detailed, to anyone who'd listen. And watch. And refrain from necking.

Ah-ha! Morpheus remembered. Redfurn's plot to reprogram "ta wee beasties." My Ghod! Could he have given the whole metallic bunch over to her? Well, why not?

"Class..."

"BYYYY YOURRRR COMMANNND!" they echoed back, two hundred and fifty strong.

Redfurn and his henchmen must have been busy scrounging up erased Cylons.

"Today's lecture -- the moons of the Colonies," she began.

Suddenly Morpheus found himself staring at large, three-dimensional images of every moon in the Colonies, in every phase, and in appropriate bunches for multi-mooned worlds in clusters.

"Oh, no," moaned Morpheus. "Not the moons, too."

The miasma behind him, the thoughts inside him, and the moons ahead of him (combined with far too little sleep) began to work. He felt his mind floating. He felt his fingers and feet itching. His teeth itched. And his skin felt all too dry...

"Ribbit?" wafted quietly into the silky darkness of the astronomy dome, as a hazy figure, somehow not at all human, slid off into the darkness.

* * * * *

Survivors. The DEMENTIA was stocked with them. On its sweeps through once-populous systems, the ship had come upon drifting hulks packed with desperate souls and little oxygen. On some of the Colony worlds, people who were not able to escape in time for the "GALACTICA exodus" were found and on-loaded. Small mining colonies -- camps, rather -- were evacuated and anything useful stuffed into the DEMENTIA's cavernous holds and store-rooms. Designed originally for extended explorations, it had room for thousands, and supplies for a small world. Only when fully fitted with the impediments of war were the batrachian ships paradoxically emptied of most supplies and crew; they were too big to be "efficient" and too massive when fully loaded for quickest maneuvering. And when scrapped, The DEMENTIA had been emptied to the last layer of paint.

Now, it was up to almost half its complement of crew, and about one-fifth the storage capacity. Survivors had plenty of room to themselves, and gradually formed groups of their "own kind" for familiarity and comfort. Not all of the groups got along well, however, and rivalries were common.

Back in the body of the ship, down on Level Thirteen, Compartments Z through X', lived the Yessmen. Dour of mien, totally bald and somewhat mottled of skin, tall and rather thin, the Yessmen and women lived and worked, weaving armoured underwear for the fighter crews and making knick-knacks for trade to other crew-critters. Perhaps it was the constant irritation of the stainless steel underclothing that made the Yessmen so testy. That and their yahrens of fanatical living and constant martial training. Strange powers they had over their bodily functions, and unnatural strength. Odd, too, were their hypnotic powers and body odour; it was said by some that they could exude a hypnotic pheromone from their sweat glands when needed. It was said by others that they just stank. Thus, perhaps, began the friction.

They were unhappy aboard the DEMENTIA, with its cheery puce walls and cerise rugs and trim. They hated the overly conditioned air and sterile, tasteless water. And especially, they hated not running things. Yessmen love to be in command. They love to run things. And they love to make things miserable for those who interfere with that running. So it went aboard the DEMENTIA -- constant annoyance of and by the Yessmen, friction and harassment. As the odds

were only thirty-four Yessmen to nine hundred others, the Yessmen figured things were about even.

Yet, still...

"Supreme Commander, it is intolerable that the soft, fuzzy ones are in command here. We, the Yessmen, ultimate development of the Colonies, must rule in their place. Destiny! Ultimate, unstoppable destiny! Yessmen must rule the ship, and all life as we know it!"

YE'Varig was screaming. Not unusual for him, of course, but the content was changed. "Yield rule of this enclave to me, SupCom, and I shall take command of this hurtling, hopping, surging hulk, and lead our people to their rightful place in the galaxy. Yield to me the right of leadership, and our people shall know victory! Yield..." YE'Varig paused in his peroration. The glorious Commander of the Yessmen was snoring gently. Timidly, YE'Varig walked over to him and nudged His Highness awake. "Your Excellency?" YE'Varig asked.

Two baleful, bloodshot eyes looked back at him from the eggular, mottled head of the SupCom. "YE'Varig," he intoned.

"Yes, Your Excellency!" replied YE'Varig, expectation of some success swelling his voice and expectations.

"YE'Varig, you are a schmuck. Your ancestors were schmucks, and your descendants, if any, will be schmucks. I am in charge here. I intend to remain in charge here. Any attempt to remove me will have to be immediately fatal to me, for, if not, I shall rip the offender to shreds. I know that your clan-mates, those two ruffians, would support you, but my clan-mates far outnumber yours. Therefore, hang it in your ear. No. Period." And the Supreme Commander ceased breathing and stopped his heart.

"Show-off," muttered YE'Varig. That was just the SupCom's way of firmly ending conversations. "You can't argue with a dead man," he'd say, and go into a trance state.

"Some day, SupCom, some day I'll really stop your heart -- permanently."

YE'Varig wandered out of the audience chamber with its somber cerise draperies and puce upholstered furniture. His clan-mates were waiting in the corridor, sitting on the fuchsia-and-mauve loungers scattered hither and thither by the Cylon janitors and maintenance crew. True to Yessman conditioning and macho, however, the henchmen were sitting on the bare springing and supporting framework, having inverted the paisley structures. "Turned you down, he did? Ungrateful. Should'a let you lead us, he should," drawled Yengvie in his soft accents.

"Shoot ta bugger!" snarled Crobal, his brother. "Take da command by force, we should...erk." He became silent as a Yessman killer-sphere rolled gently into the corridor and detonated. YE'Varig and crew picked themselves up off the smoldering, shaggy carpeting and motivated off down the corridor. They could take a subtle hint when it was offered.

"Take over by force," YE'Varig muttered. "Take over the whole thing by force..."

"The enclave?" asked Yengvie.

"No, stupid, the ship!" snarled his cousin. "Take over the ship, and SupCom shall yield to me. Before or after he exits a spacelock without a suit."

Grimly, the trio settled into a vermillion-and-cyan swirled niche for a serious conference.

* * * * *

The warbook came alive. Flashing onto the screen in lines of green fire came the distinctive outline and data display for the Cylon attack craft she had been expecting. Tapping her arm switch, Flight Lieutenant Tribblia firmly clenched the control stick in her right hand. Her left remained poised over the auxiliary function panel, to attend to emergencies. Being a highly trained -- if slightly mad -- Warrior, she was also a highly developed split personality; the right half flew and fired; the left "kept house" and controlled the auxiliary functions. Each functioned well independently, so well that she occasionally had trouble resynchronising after a good fight. One reason she'd been on Rest-and-Revamp treatment before the final disaster. She'd found herself keeping a running dialogue between herself, at times. But now, both halves were functioning expertly.

She punched her turbos for a brief high-G spurt and flashed around in an over-hand half-loop. The Cylon that had been trying to sneak up on her potted off a quick shot, then wheeled right and away. As it swept to her side, she punched the attitude spin jet overrides and cut her thrust completely. The Viper ceased to accelerate and began to rotate about its centre of gravity, controlled only by the quickly-expended auxiliary attitude jets. Even though their thrust was miniscule compared to the main engines, they sufficed to spin the craft much faster than the Cylon could travel; she had a much higher angular velocity than the Raider. Rapidly, the Cylon settled into her sights as she spun gently. She lightly caressed the fire toggle on the stick, and watched the Cylon flash into debris and malevolent curses.

"Frak it, Trib, you can't do that! It leaves you dead in space and open to any Cylon that comes along, and it..."

"Cool it, Neb, you just hate to get fragged. That maneuver is perfectly fine in free-space one-on-one fights. Just don't try it with more than one red-eye around, and you'll be okay." Tribblia quietly reset her battleboard in the simulation niche and readied for another run. Quiet (mostly) and calm, she fought well. It was only when not fighting that she had problems. Both of her.

"Felgercarb! Why in Fortran do I always have to be the red-eye? I would like more time on the Viper. Or even the damn Gnat. Why do you always have...?"

"Because if you don't cool it and play Cylon, I'll walk over there and punch your lights out. That's why." Tribblia was very firm about that. Also quite ready to do a light out-punching. Lovely girl, but a bit forceful.

Young Lieutenant Neb was sulking. "Amazons. All Amazons. Don't let a guy have any fun." He glanced over at her trim yet full figure stretched over the console of her simulator, adjusting the tracking scope. "No fun at all."

Tribblia kept to herself, in more ways than one.

Before Neb and Tribblia could begin another engagement, several figures walked onto the darkened bridge -- Yessmen by their gait and size. Light gleamed off their bald skulls, reflecting oddly on the metallic mottling.

"Excellent. No one on duty now. Must be in the turbo-flush. Crobai, take the con. Yengvie, seal off the dome. We'll..." YE'Varig spun on his heel, nearly falling over.

"What in the nine hells of Map do you characters want?" inquired Tribblia, stepping out of the simulator niche to one side of the massive dome.

Rather than answering, YE'Varig dropped a killer-sphere into one hand and whipped it underhanded at her. Tribblia (both of her) executed a dive roll to one fire control console for shelter while Neb, still in the shadows, cut loose with his hastily-drawn megablasters. Both missed, the killer-sphere detonating against a support pillar near Tribblia, and Neb's shot heatedly dispatching a water cooler near the Damage Control Officer's station. Paint fragments all of three inches thick splattered one end of the dome, as glass fragments and steam obscured the other. More spheres began hurtling around the dome as Yengvie and Crobai joined the fight, and insulation and control chairs began smoldering as Tribblia began cutting loose on her own. The control dome rapidly obscured with smoke as each side fired happily away.

"Give up!" howled YE'Varig. "We have you outnumbered!" He threw a shiriken toward Neb.

"Felgercarb! There are three of you, and three of us -- Neb, and both of me!" hollered Tribblia, blasting with her left hand, while the right whipped a chunk of shattered conduit toward a smoke-shrouded figure. It was Neb, but then, no one's perfect.

"What?" wondered YE'Varig, dodging toward the hazy figure; he mistook Neb for one of his own people -- Tribblia was firing at him, right?

Wrong. "Trib?" came out of the darkness. "Trib?"

"Trib, what?" asked YE'Varig.

Both figures popped up to see who was carrying on such an inane conversation, saw each other, and fired point-blank while trying to hide. Both shots went way wide, Trib began blasting at both impartially, and the fire-drenching system came on.

"FIRE IN THE LANDING BAY," blared the automatics. "FIRE IN THE BAY."

"Then why in Hades are you drenching us?" howled Tribblia.

"LANDING BAY AUTOMATIC SYSTEMS DISCONNECTED. ACTING TO PROTECT SHIP," blatted

the somewhat nasal voice of the computer. Already, water was pooling on the old worn floors, adding to the growing haze.

Neb reached an intracom station. Dead. He noticed a glowing pit in the wall nearby, with a cable protruding which sparked every time he punched the go button. "Com's out!" he yelled. "I'll go for help!" And he dove for the exit.

"Stop him!" yelled YE'Varig. Both Crobal and Yengvie dove after him.

"Ah-ha!" yelled Tribblia. "Now I've got you! I outnumber you! Surrender, or die!" And with that, she leaped for YE'Varig. Both crashed into and through an emergency fire exit (enabled by the fire control system) and plunged headlong into the main swimming pool.

They spent the next twenty centons playing hide-and-seek around lounge furniture while "SINKING STATIONS" alarms came and went, the deluge stopped, and corridors began to steam. As Tribblia hid behind an ice machine, and YE'Varig tried to recharge a killer ball from a wall outlet, a shape entered the pool area. Drawn by some primal instinct, the Commander-as-Were-Frog padded in.

Tribblia took one look and started to cut the strange figure down. Fortunately, she noticed the distinctive metallic blue glow of the Commander's suit, and then his insignia. "A frog?" she thought to herself. "A giant frog in the Commander's uniform?"

YE'Varig just stared. Then, as the ball began to buzz faintly in his hand, showing it had been adequately fed, he hurled it full at the strange figure. At such a close range, he couldn't miss.

He didn't. Quite.

Morpheus turned as YE'Varig threw, and reached up one webbed paw. Faster than any mere man could move, he plucked the ball out of mid-air. He regarded it for half a heartbeat, recognised it, and lost interest. "Here," he said. "Catch." And threw the deadly sphere back to YE'Varig.

YE'Varig, unfortunately, possessed great reflexes. He caught the ball perfectly and held it, stunned, as it detonated.

Morpheus stood over the smoking grease spot on the floor near the high dive tower. "What in Hades is going on here?" he wondered out loud to himself.

"They tried to take over the...eep!" Tribblia yelped, suddenly finding a hundred kilos of were-frog standing nose-to-nose with her. "Nice leap," she got out weakly.

"Don't startle me like that. Please?" asked Morpheus. He dropped the claw-studded paw he'd almost hit Tribblia with to his side. "With this problem," he gestured to himself, "I'm not inclined to be calm. Sorry for frightening you." He handed back the blaster he'd knocked from her hand. "Frak!" He looked at the grease spot, then at Lieutenant Tribblia. "Explain, please."

Tribblia took one look at the mouth full of inch-long fangs, the three-inch

dewclaws, and the Commander's insignia. "Yessir. Right away, sir." She proceeded to fill him in on the problem with the Yessmen.

"Three of them? Three turkeys to take over my ship? My ship?" thundered the Commander, almost as beside himself as Tribblia usually was. "Where are the others?"

"Probably chasing Neb. Er...Sir? You are the Commander, aren't you?" she asked -- very carefully.

"Yeah. Slight problem with moons. My time of year. Sorry. What can I say?"

"You can say we'll hunt down those others," she replied.

"Right!" Morpheus answered, and leaped about twenty-five feet to the intracom.

"ATTENTION, ALL HANDS. THIS IS THE COMMANDER. TWO YESSMEN ARE RUNNING AMOK ABOARD THIS SHIP, PROBABLY CURRENTLY CHASING FLIGHT LIEUTENANT NEB OF CERISE SQUADRON. STOP THEM. ALL OTHER YESSMEN ARE TO REPORT TO THEIR QUARTERS UNTIL THIS THING IS SETTLED. REPEAT -- REPORT TO YOUR QUARTERS, PLEASE. THAT IS ALL."

The intracom belched, politely. "SupCom of the Yessmen, to Commander Morpheus. What is the meaning...of...er..." The SupCom found himself face-to-face, via full-colour 3-D image, with the batrachian Commander. Unlike most people, he knew of the experiments, and their results. He had once insulted a Were Warrior who was very drunk, and found himself hanging upside-down over a mile drop into a gorge, suspended from a large, green, well-clawed paw very much like the Commander's. "Er, yessir. Right away, sir. Now. Immediately. Yessir." He faded from the screen. In the Yessmen enclave, a minor hurricane hit, as the SupCom did his best to find out just who had pissed off a Were -- and why. And how to calm that Were down.

"Gleep. Commander, Redfurn here. One o' my wee beasties r'ports firin' near yer position. Tis 6-C', sir. My, but ye're lookin' a bit green aroond ta gills, sir. Nice gills, though. Ummm..."

"Thank you, Redfurn," replied the Commander, and leaped -- literally -- off to point 6-C'. Tribblia followed, her fluffy cloud of hair seeming to glow from the ceiling lights and the miasma still rising from the soggy rugs.

Near the C' intersection of Deck 6, Yengvie drew a dead bead on Neb's fleeing back. He chuckled deep in his throat, just like the 3-V villains he'd been studying, and started to fire his blaster. "Got you, oh, spawn of the slime pits," he grated out in the best villainous manner. Then he screamed like a trampled daggit puppy as something with the force of a Viper smashed him in the side. He had time, before shock dimmed his mind forever, to see a visage of terror from his deepest fears looming in the foggy corridor, limned by a brightly glowing ceiling light, while his mangled body hit the corridor wall and stuck. The visage seemed to haze as it moved, faster than he could follow, as the Commander's reflexes took him through the thirty-micron kata of attack faster than the eye could follow. Purely automatic, the cycle was designed to destroy a single armed and armoured figure in front of the Were War-

rior as quickly and as thoroughly as possible.

It was a question whether Yengvie was truly dead before or after his several parts hit the corridor floor and walls. No matter. As Tribblia hurried past the reddened corridor, she knew he wasn't going to hurt anyone again. "Well," she thought to herself as her foot skidded on a piece of freshly-throbbing Yessman liver, "not consciously, anyhow." She kept on running after Crobal.

She came to a turning in the corridor as Crobal stepped out, his own blaster raised. She didn't think; she simply fired. Crobal vanished in a haze of bloody steam.

"Oh, my," she muttered to herself, as the charred remnants slid down the wall and squished into the rug. "Oh, my. Oh, my." She somehow felt a little ill.

* * * * *

Cleaning up took awhile. The control dome needed considerable reworking. Especially when the Commander noticed the blaster pits in the walls showed three full inches of old paint. A full platoon of Cylons spent several days chipping paint and feeding it to the convertors. The stuff provided most of the trace elements the ship's hydroponics section had been screaming about, and also, its absence made the place seem quite a lot larger. The change from violet to cool grey helped, too.

The pool area also took a bit of repair, as did the corridors. Finally, after serving faithfully, the old rugs came up. New ones replaced them, in tasteful patterns of green and yellow.

And in Compartments Z through X', on Deck 13, small signs of Yessman manufacture sprouted. They all said the same thing. "Thou shalt not hassle the Commander." Period.

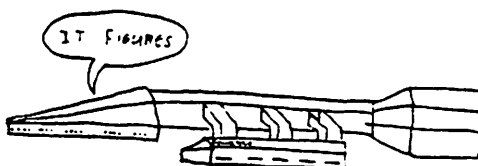
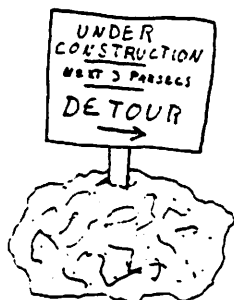
And the crew? They took the news of the Commander's Were heritage calmly for the most part. He did notice that he no longer had to raise his voice for anything, that he had the free and complete use of the ship's pool any time he wanted it -- or even any time he got near it.

And he found he got invited to every party aboard the ship. The crew felt safer that way.

In fact, they felt lots safer when they knew where he was. And very happy to have him on their side.

Ribbit...

Thou shalt not hassle the Commander.



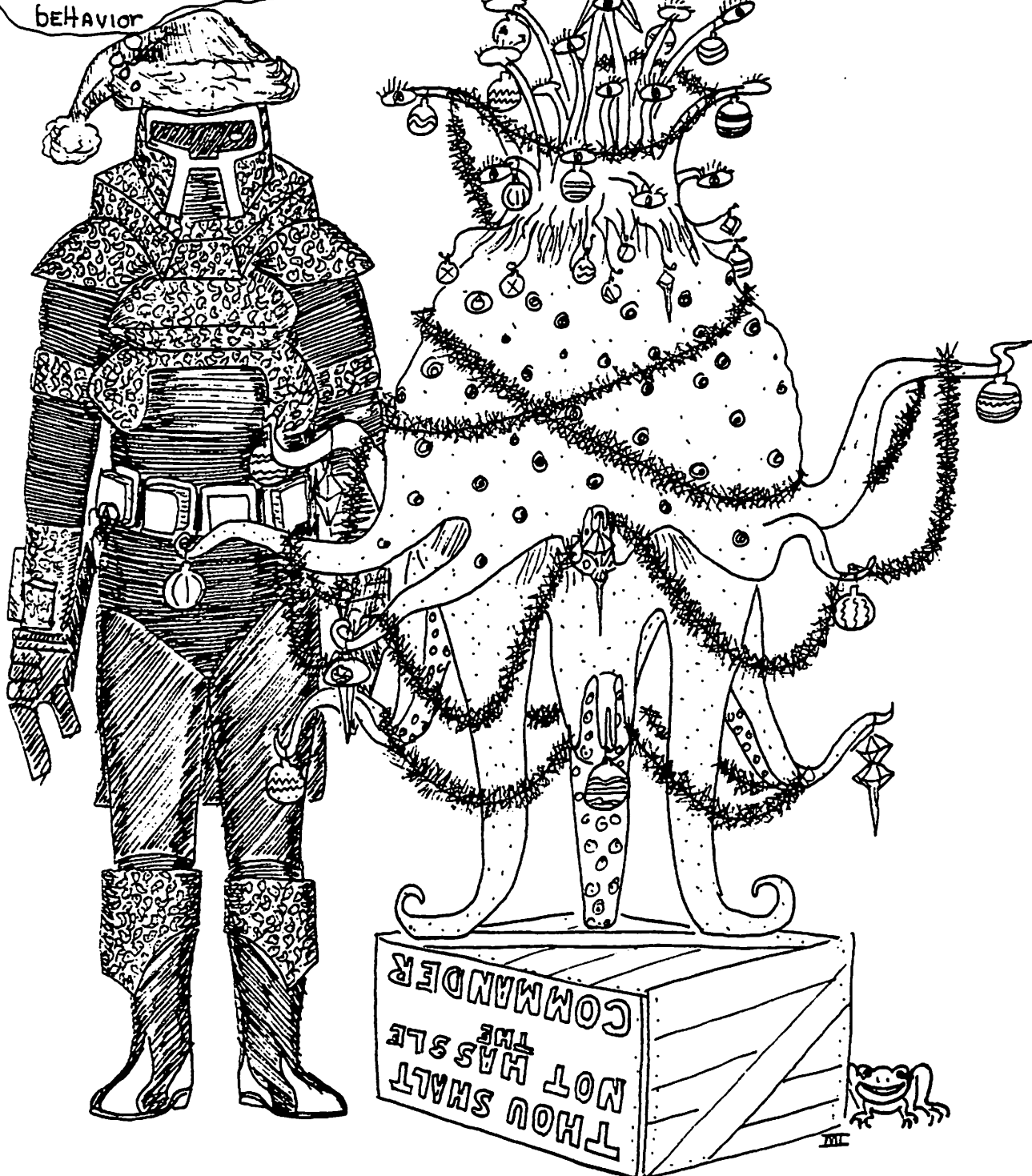
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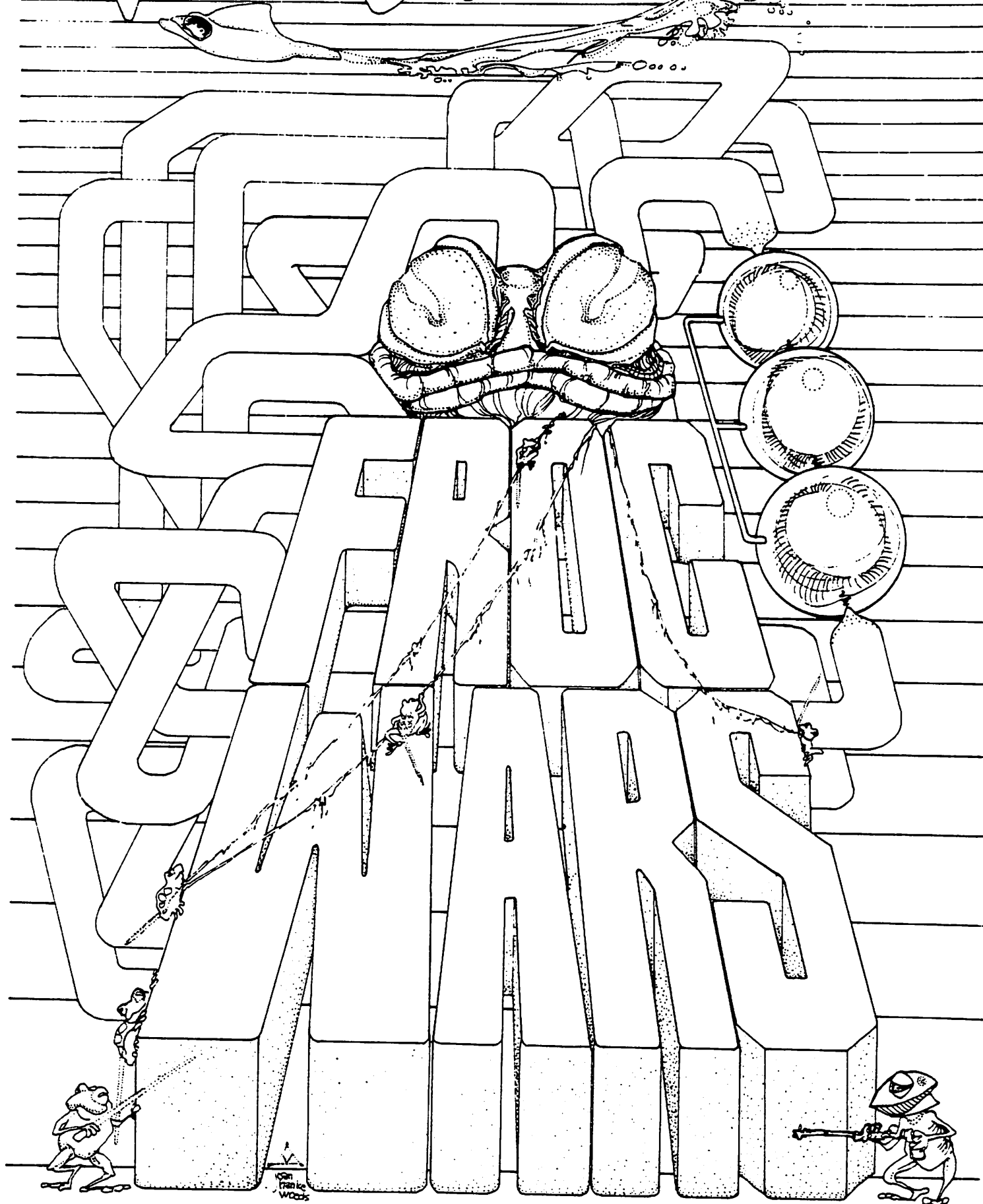
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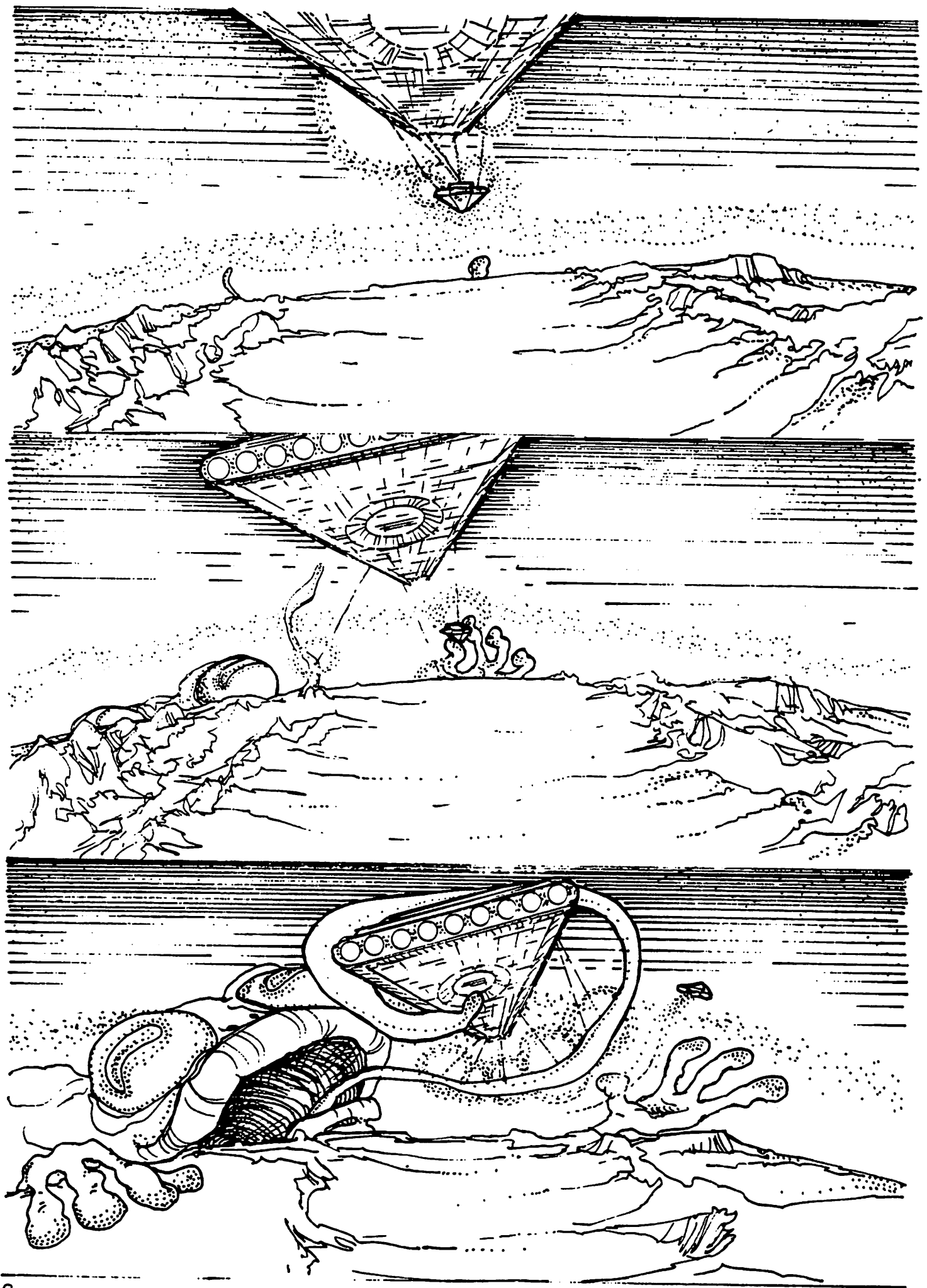
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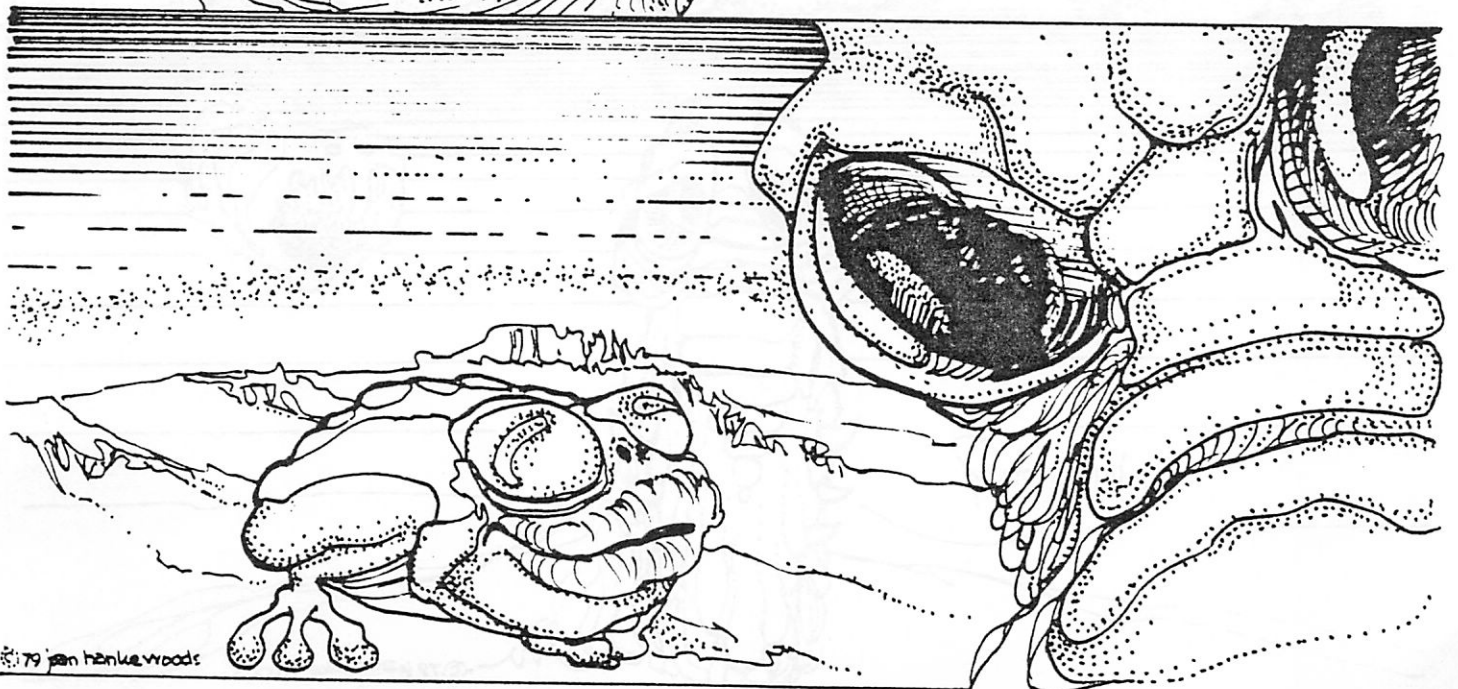
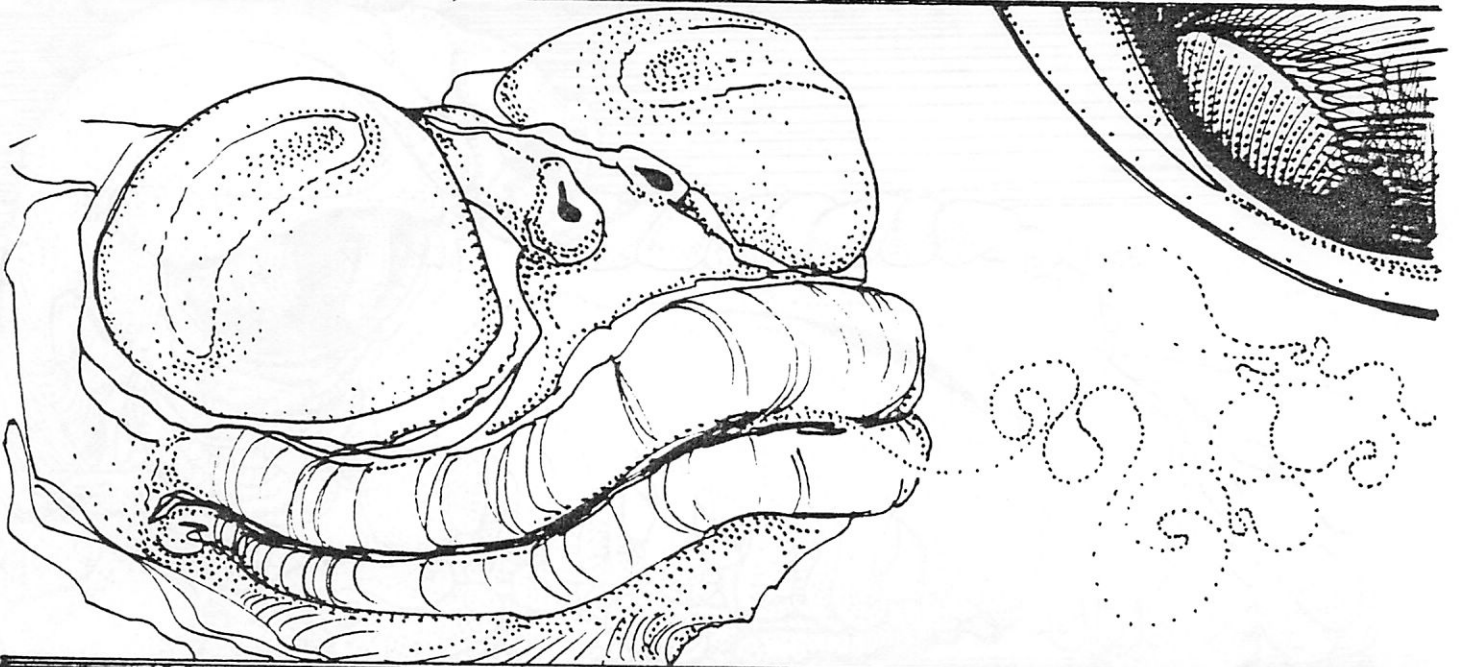
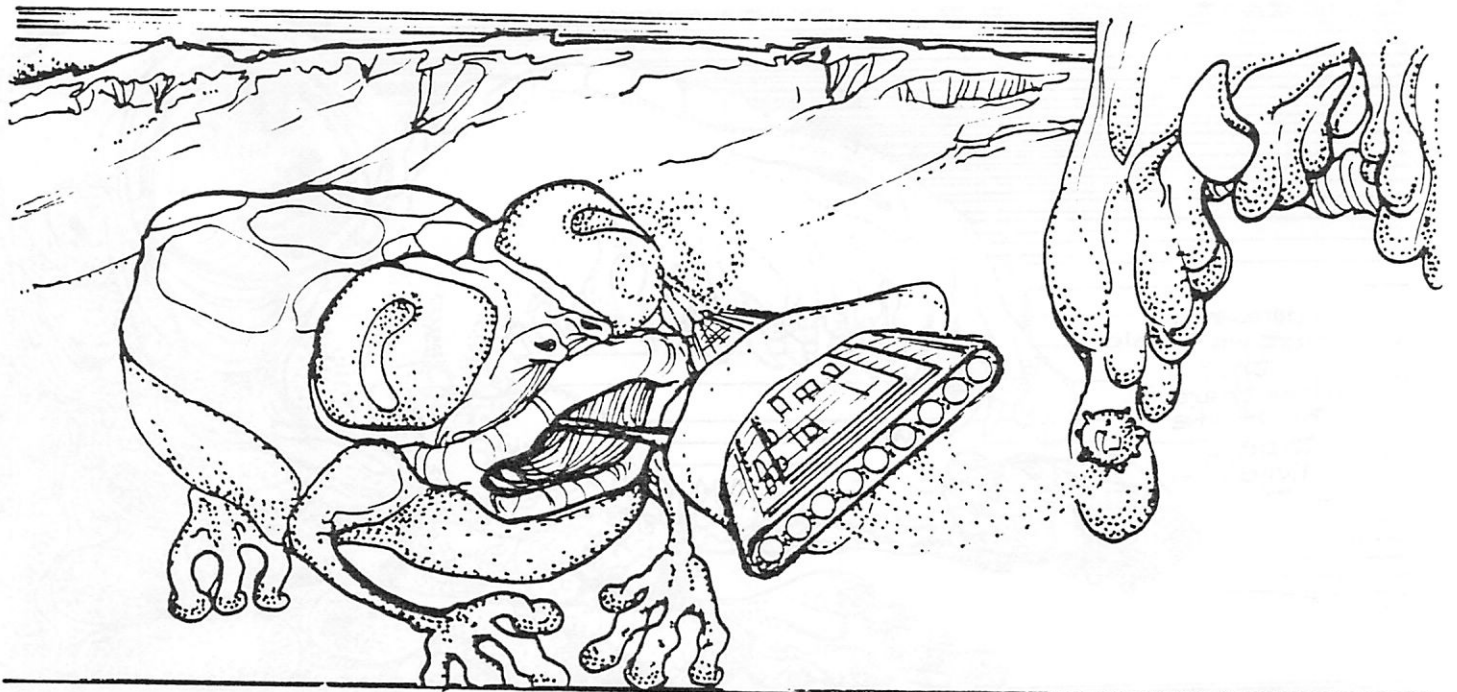
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NAME DID I GET
TALKED INTO THIS?

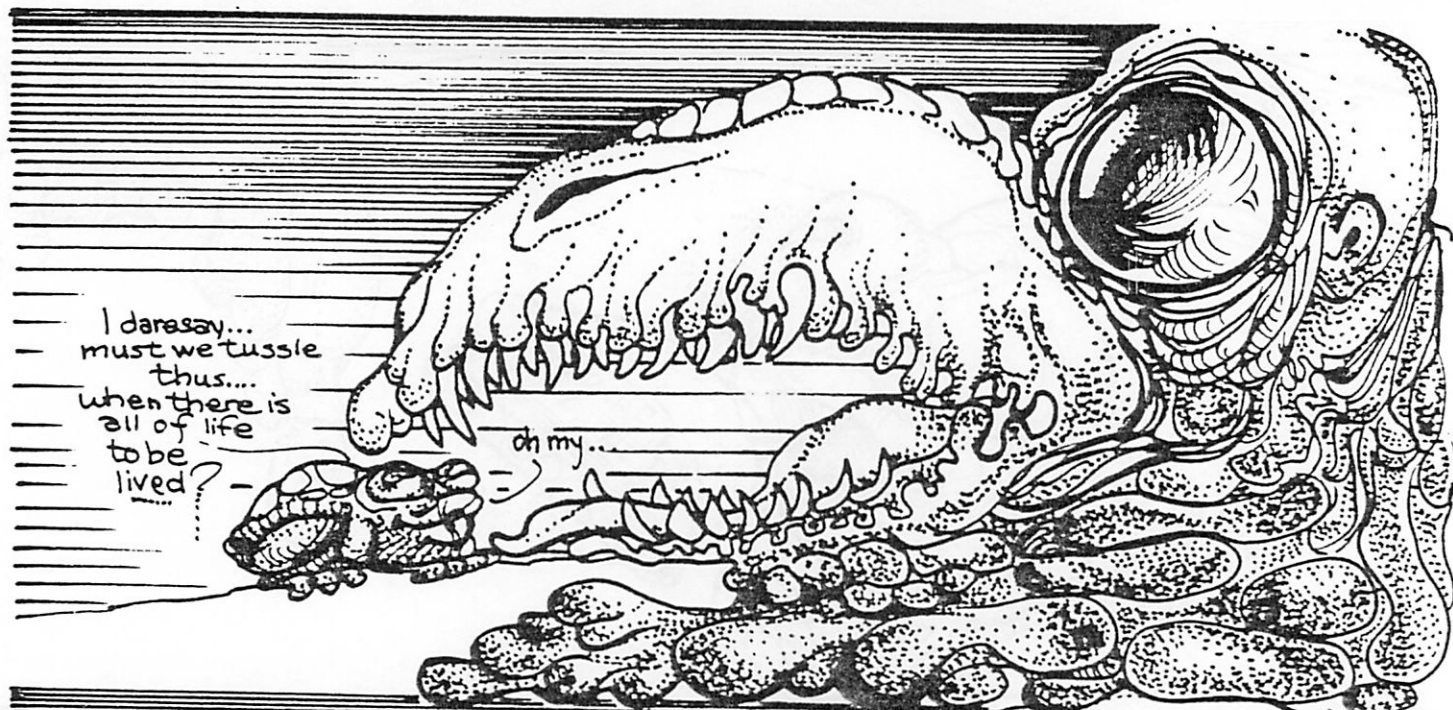


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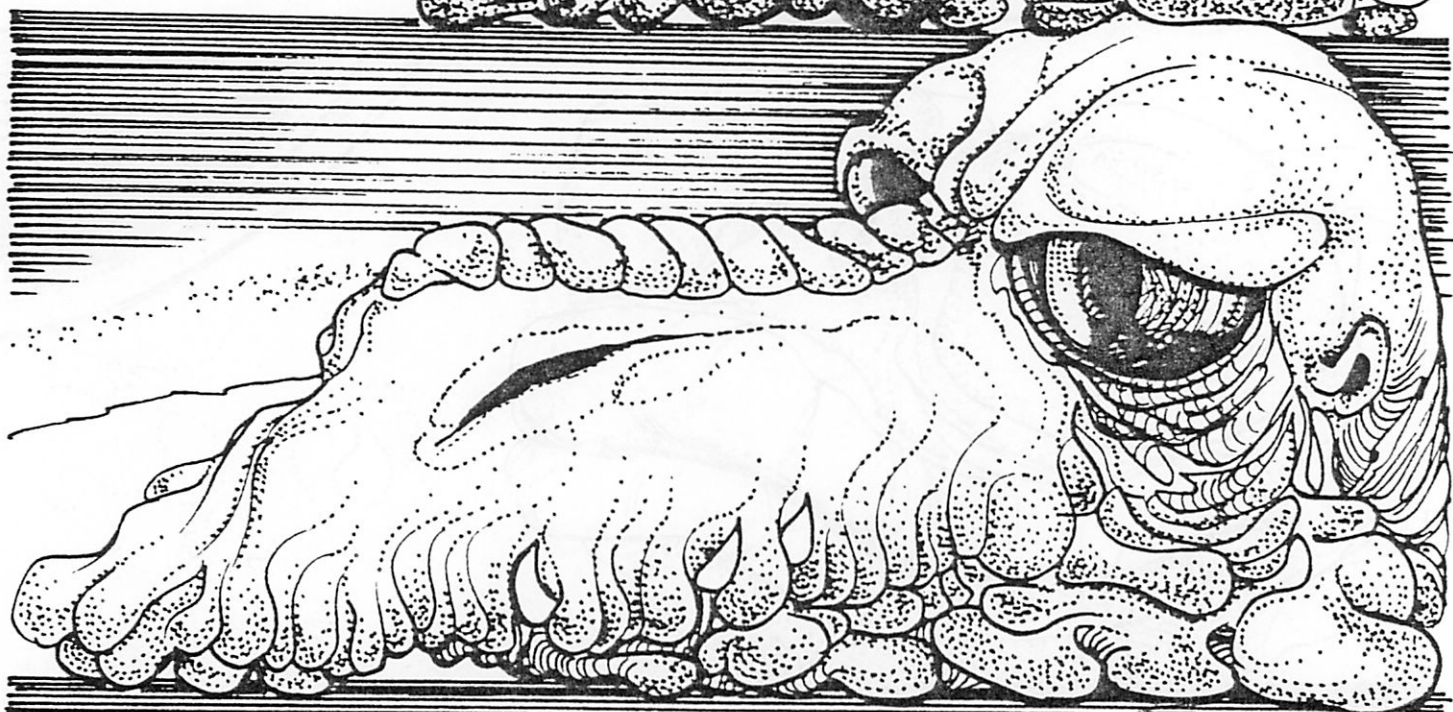






I darasay...
must we tussle
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when there is
all of life
to be
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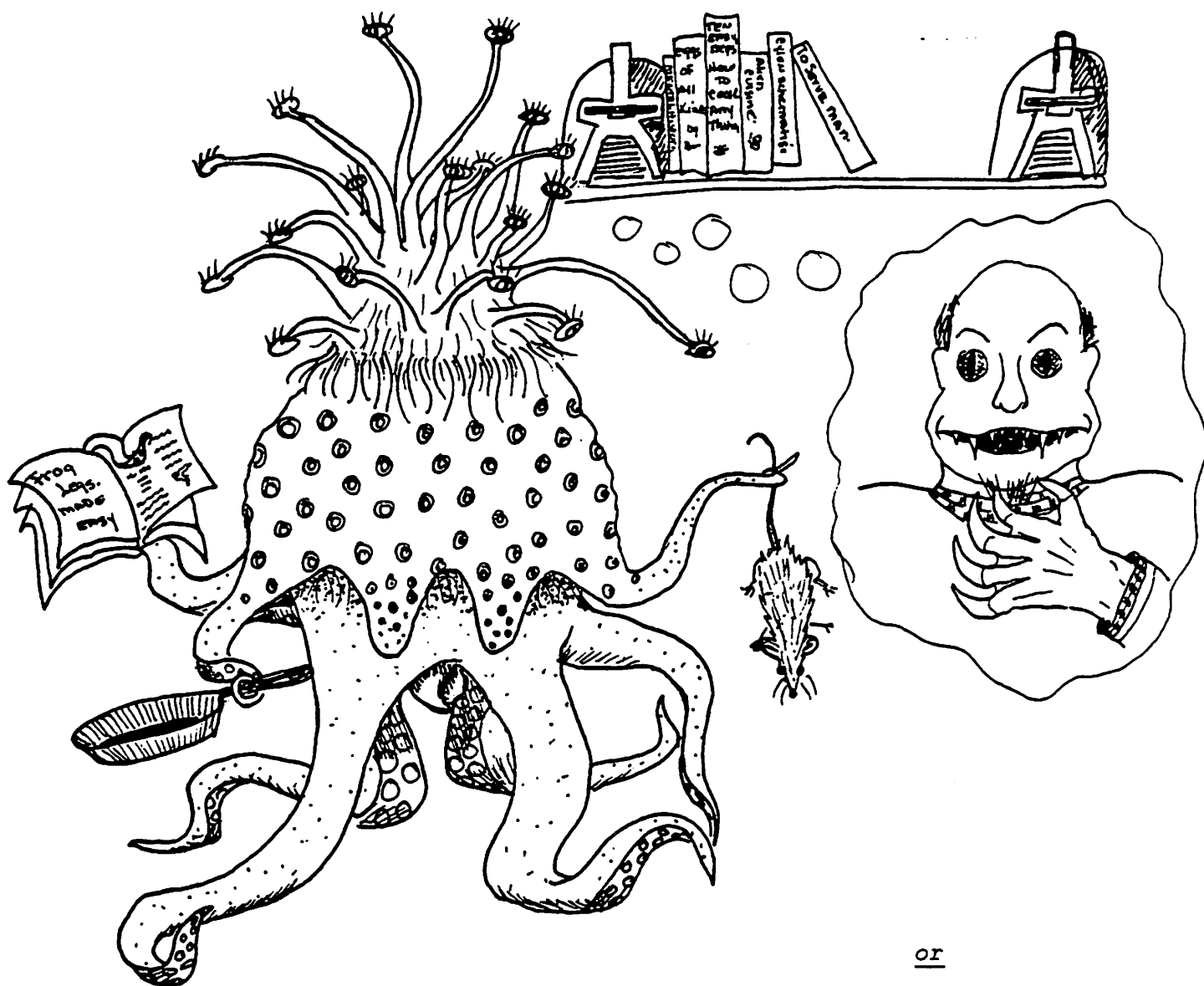
oh my...



by whom?

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"Time and Tide Wait for No Critter"



or

"He Who Hesitates Is Lunch"
Part I

Story by Robert Smerp

Art by Marj Ihssen

"Time and Tide Wait for No Critter"

OR

"He Who Hesitates Is Lunch," Part I

(By Robert Smerp)

Stated simply, the DEMENTIA is large. Intended for deep-space exploration, it comes equipped with quarters and recreational facilities for over two thousand plus herds of scientific advisors and explorers and vast space for auxiliary exploration craft and landing barges. With all this space for people (or whatever), it is nevertheless mostly storage space and engines. Drive systems take up the volume of a small mountain, while storage is only slightly less vast.

When rescued from the oblivion of a scrapheap, most of the DEMENTIA was at least cursorily examined and most quarters and human-service areas pressurised. When Commander Redfurn's people scrounged through the generally empty storage spaces looking for anything still usable, they seldom found much. The ship had been stripped of most movable objects still usable by the Colonials elsewhere. Fortunately, the Colonial salvage crews left all purely DEMENTIA parts like drive components and Gnat pieces to be rendered into component metals, along with everything built in too big to pry out. Thus, the ship was still fairly well stocked with odds and vital ends when appropriated from Zeebknaarf Salvage Base. Subsequent raids on former human colonies, mining bases, and ram-scoop passes near gas giants had topped off the expendable stores of the ship, and filled many storage holds with heaps of "stuff."

It had been during the last rescue stop on Scorpionus (detailed elsewhere) that Commander Morpheus stuffed the ship with breathing vapours (Scorpionus didn't have what most people would call a kosher atmosphere) in the form of cubic kilometres of vapour condensed to damn-near the point of solidity.

It was with this superfluity of breathing stuff that the Cylon maintenance crew began filling all areas likely to be frequented by humans. Thus was Storage Bay Number Thirteen filled with stuff for breathing. Thus did the Cylon maintenance techs, gay in their body paint jobs, meander through looking for odds and ends. Thus did a very odd end, indeed, find them...

* * * * *

In the far corner of Storage Bay Thirteen lurked "things." The Cylon maintenance crew were not given to flights of fancy -- being machines -- yet, they sensed uncanny presences hiding just beyond the glare of their body-lights. The crew had the unenviable job of refurbishing all supply systems, chipping paint (with blasters set on "crispy"), and general maintenance and janitorial duty. Digging through the accumulated debris of about a kiloyahren of deep space navigation was no fun, even for Cylons, yet they persevered. Bay Thirteen seemed to have been used to store all of the material no one could find current uses for, but couldn't part with. I.e., the joint was packed with junk. Most of it could be used now, of course. People with no possessions

don't really care if their furniture is out of style, or if their uniforms had changed colour yahrens ago. They didn't mind refurbishing antique tools and electronics, since they had absolutely nothing newer within foreseeable reach. So, the Cylons sifted and sorted.

They really couldn't be blamed for the incident beginning in Room M, Bay Thirteen. Late one ship's day, they had let breathing stuff into Room M, and raised its temperature from nearly zero absolute. The latter they did gradually; the chamber had apparently been ignored for a century and vacuum-locked. The temperature compensators were shut down to conserve power. Whatever resided therein, therefore, was perhaps well-preserved, but thoroughly dead. So reasoned the Cylons.

Pity.

Within Room M, Bay Thirteen, "something" sensed the hiss of atmosphere entering the chilled blackness. Dim life forces stirred feebly, at first, to the faint increases in temperature. Hour by hour, as the pressure rose, as the temperature rose, life forces long dormant quickened. Hours after the process began, almost a day later, the still-chilly chamber was misted with "fresh" atmosphere. The ambient temperature was almost comfortable for unshielded humans to work in, had any been around. Yet, the chamber stayed sealed. The maintenance crew'd had bad luck with ancient objects, stable in cryo-rest for yahrens, that had suddenly exploded with much greater than token force. Several of the Cylon team had been damaged, one almost to the point of extinction. Hence, they were careful.

Room M sat at STP (Standard Temperature and Pressure) for two whole days. During that time, something awoke.

The Cylon crew breached the hatch and began archaeological ruminating. Marvin-3, the pack leader, was cautiously on the lookout for likely-looking explosive parcels, but he and his crew ignored the large egg-shaped bundle of organic matter hunched in the corner. To Marvin-3 it resembled a giant cocoon. Reason told him the thing, if cocoon it was, would be very thoroughly dead by this time. Only if it began to decompose would they pay it any attention. This was just fine with the cocoon.

The Cylons completed their looting for the time, and finally dragged the last oddments of prized antiques from Room M. The door slammed shut, the lights stayed on, the air vents sighed, and the warmth remained. Within the cocoon sentience began to rise. Centars later, so did something else.

Gently, furtively, silently, the strands at the top of the survival cocoon were pushed apart -- from the inside. Very slowly, very gently, a small glistering orb on a deep greenish stalk emerged from the bundle. It unfolded, not unlike a flower, and a small baby-blue eyeball with a black hexagonal pupil surveyed the room. It scanned very thoroughly every visible nook and cranny, and slowly emerged farther to continue its exploration. One by one, more little baby-blues emerged from the silk bundle to stare around the confines of the chamber. Finally, orangish hair or fur became visible, around the base of the undulating forest of little eyeballs. Gently, several orangish tentacle-tips emerged beside the fuzz ball, and began to edge the silk downward. Slowly, hesitantly, with all the grace and daring of an old lady emerging from a

body corset, a shape extricated itself from the cocoon. Finally, Schmeem, explorer first class, stood beside the deflated husk that had protected it for Ghod knew how long. Silently, sadly, desperately, the greatest explorer its world had ever produced began to cry.

A few time periods later, Schmeem shook him/her/it/them(?)self out of the almost suicidal melancholy. Home gone, destroyed by mechanical invaders. Its ship, smashed by a totally unlikely chunk of interstellar debris. Its crew-mate dead in the totally balled-up landing attempt, and Schmeem, while healing in the cocoon state, had been carried off by critter or critters unknown like a loaf of murple bread from a bakery. Now, where in the green blazes was it? The room felt and smelt all wrong for its kind. It seemed unlikely that it was really an adjunct to the stairway to paradise its people's mythology spoke of. The mechanicals? One of their ships? It would have to find out.

Gingerly, gently, Schmeem slithered over to the door. It leaned its beet-shaped body against the chill metal and listened for noises outside. Little blue eyes waved around as it tried to concentrate on hearing. Possessing auditory sensation over the entire surface of its body was handy, most of the time, and made for great sensitivity for airborne noise, but sound-conduction was a problem. Faintly, Schmeem heard noises in the distance.

"What the Hell," thought Schmeem to itself. "Know or knever." Schmeem backed up a bit and raised one mass-handling tentacle off the floor to what seemed to be a latch. It tugged, and the handle came off with a faint "ping." Schmeem stared at the thing with a handful of eyes and then slung it with all its force toward the farthest corner of the compartment. It hit with a noise like a kamikaze scorpion spearing a bass drum. Schmeem, no doubt still unhinged by its long hibernation and confined condition, began hopping around the compartment, snorting. It was while doing a version of its race's Dance of Great and Utter Annoyance, type I, that an inquisitive Cylon opened the door from outside.

Poor Cylon. It wasn't really ready for the sight of a man-high orange beet with a cluster of baby-blue eyes on stalks emerging from a clump of orange hair at its narrow top, dancing madly around an old storage room on a set of six heavy tentacles sprouting from its bottom, with a few tiny tentacles waving angrily in the air. Cylons aren't supposed to feel shock, but this specimen went into instant catatonia.

Schmeem, on the other hand, was unprepared for the sudden entrance of a paisley-painted Cylon warrior with a whisk broom and mop. While the Cylon froze up, Schmeem shrieked and headed for the door. As the Cylon toppled out of its way, the explorer ricocheted through the hatch, off a heap of ancient crates (which promptly disintegrated), off two surprised Cylons carrying a crate of vegetable preserves (which shattered), and finally into masses of ducting, pipes, cables, cargo-handling gear, and frank miscellania festooning the ceiling of the bay.

Marvin-3 had just emerged from the pyramid game in Room C when this occurred. "Great Honk," he thought to himself, "we're under attack!" and beat feet to the nearest communicator.

"Command deck! This is Marvin-3 on Deck Thirteen, Bay Thirteen, maintenance

and refit platoon. We appear to be under tentacled attack by a vegetable. Three of my crew are down, one not moving. Request back-up immediately!"

On the command deck, Flight Lieutenant Tribblia ceased her interminable shooting down of Sergeant Neb. Sergeant Symington, at the actual control console, seemed to be in a slight state of shock. "Problems, Sergeant?" inquired the Lieutenant.

Symington didn't reply; he just replayed Marvin-3's odd message. As the final hysterical syllables grated out of the speaker, he threw an image of Bay Thirteen on the main command screen at the top of the dome. All in the dome stared at the carnage. They could see several Cylon crew lurching about the area, while others thrashed on the floor. Several of the 'lons were splattered with what looked like blood. In a heap on the floor lay what seemed to be human bodies, some missing limbs.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Symington. "Something's murdering humans! Shall we send a security party to the bay?" he asked of Tribblia, who had the deck watch this time of night. Both of her.

"Cylons!" cried yet another lieutenant. "It's a plot! Dirty, sneaking Cylons -- just waited until we weren't looking, and they begin to murder humans! Let's exterminate all the..." Tribblia calmly drew her laser, set it on stun -- and zapped the hysterical Flight Lieutenant Mord. When silence again reigned on the bridge, Tribblia began to ask questions.

"You mention Cylon casualties. What about the bodies of humans and the blood? What vegetable? Where did it come from? Who let it out of what? What in the frak is going on down there?"

"Sorry, boss. No humans hurt; those are just dysfunctional display mannequins left over from a few centuries ago. The "blood" is vegetable preserves. Hildegard-6 let the thing out of Room M. Hildegard-6 appears to be in catatonic withdrawal. The vegetable seems to have been in storage there. Where's the help?" Marvin-3 was staring wildly around the bay, his ocular spot bouncing like a demented radish.

"Symington, send a batch of security types to that area. Have them set their weapons on stun -- not parboil -- and bring us that maniac vegetable!" Tribblia ordered.

"Yes'm. They're on their way. Shall I waken the Commander? He's probably over his migraine by now. And his hangover should be dissipating. And the moons are not out?" The tall, thin, sandy-haired, bookish Flight Sergeant waited for further instructions.

Tribblia considered. "Let him sleep for a while longer. I would really hate to be the one to wake him for a rampant rutabaga," she stated. Meanwhile, "Frightening the Cylons?" she thought to herself. "That is quite a change." Awaiting developments, she let her right half go back to pursuing Neb across the simulated cosmos.

* * * * *

"Starved. Food. Starving. Gotta find lunch. Protein. Carbohydrates. Sugar. Gleepha root. Veeb steak. Schmaltz-burgers. Old compost heaps. Anything."

Thoughts of food rampaged through Schmeem's mind. It had been estivating for yahrens and needed fuel! Creeping along in the ductwork, it reached an open cargo hatch and sneaked through, just as a Cylon, with great heroism, and no sense of self-preservation at all, set the hatch controls to seal off Bay Thirteen. Thus, while the rescue team was beating on the door to get in, the Cylons were nervously sidling around the area with clubs looking for the critter they had just locked out.

Schmeem didn't care. It just motivated away from the sight of its latest traumatic shock. Still, it noticed. "Organics?" it thought to itself. "Trying to get at the metal-heads, and carrying guns? Just who runs this thing, anyway?" It schproinged off down the corridor roof, avoiding people and Cylons, and looking for something to munch.

One time it saw, from its lofty vantage point, something large, green, and fully equipped with sharp pointy objects hopping down a corridor that led to a large tank of water. It followed it, thinking of ways to see if it was edible, but froze as a wash of scantily-clad pink bipeds suddenly left the area as the critter hopped in. HMMMMM.

Not knowing that the human crew liked to give the Were Commander plenty of room in his frogular shape, and not realising the red eyes of the creature were caused by hangover and migraine, it nevertheless made the logical connections of hierarchy aboard this ship. Cylons do maintenance. Humans (bipeds) carry the weapons. And the weapon-carrying bipeds flee from one large greenish dude. Conclusion -- bug anyone, anyone at all but that greenish hoppy critter. Schmeem slithered off down the ceiling.

Meanwhile, Morpheus, in Were form, submerged himself in the large swimming pool with such of the crew who were not bothered by Were (some of them, he noticed, were Were). No one thought to tell him of the vegetable that stalked Cylons. Somehow, he never thought to ask.

* * * * *

"Food! Food! Wonderful food!"

Schmeem cavorted happily about the ceiling of a large dark chamber, hugging the piping for sheer joy. It sensed, smelled, and almost felt edibles in great quantity down below itself. Carefully, Schmeem slithered down a large feed pipe to the floor and began cautiously feeling around. Something went "click," and light began flickering from a gadget like a table in front of it. As did heat, it noticed, burning its number-three micro-manipulating tentacle painfully. "Ghods," it chortled to itself, "a stove. These critters might even be civilised."

Bubbling happily, oblivious to its surroundings, Schmeem began grabbing cauldrons, skillets, pots, pans, choppers and nippers, graters and garnishers, seasoning jars and essence containers. And food. Great, glorious quantities of food in every conceivable form. Vegetable protein, animal substances, all

sorts of things. Happily chomping a pound of the alien equivalent of hot red peppers, Schmeem began to cook.

Hours later, a just-off-patrol bunch of mixed madmen and geriatric cases stumbled into Auxiliary Mess Hall D, located below the landing bay of the DEMENTIA. The first one in flipped on the room's lights, stumbled over to the bar, and drew himself a litre of Near-bheer. He ignored everything else until the last drop of the first bheer off patrol gurgled down his parched throat. Then he began to look around. Nothing out of the ordinary. Just the usual herd of Warriors sozzling their thirsts, and that vegy-looking person preparing dinner. Nothing out of the ordinary. Flight Lieutenant Heep wandered over to the cooking area where he usually wound up fixing something more-or-less edible for himself and such of the crew as could stand it. "Hey, guy," he burbled, "Neat stuff ya got cookin' here. Kin I try some?" Not hearing a negative from the now blissfully stuffed Schmeem, he plunged a ladle into one oddly bubbling pot. "Wow, guy! Neat stuff, man! Whatever it is." He tried something else, then another concoction. Heep, it may be seen, was notable for one constant condition -- his brain hovered about six metres over the deck at all times. He began to serve himself from the various concoctions, and then made way for a few of the others. The rest of the crew wasn't too sure about the odd chef at first, but slurps from their more adventurous (or less sane) comrades persuaded them.

Such was the condition when the engineering swing shift trundled in for chow. Schmeem, being not entirely stupid, recognised a good thing when it saw one. It kept cooking. And the engineering crew started munching. Only when the bedraggled would-be rescue team wandered in did things lose their cool.

"Sonny beaches, mon. Tat's da ting we's supposed ta git," one slightly strung-out member of the team screamed, and cut loose with his laser. Schmeem honked once in surprise and terror and leaped for the ceiling. Several of the engineering types, singed by the blast, jumped the security man, while his teammates began to jump them.

Within three millicentons, there was a gorgeous row in the auxiliary mess. The outnumbered security team was rapidly subdued, and the hungry crew rapidly began to look for the missing vegetable cook.

What do you say to a scared vegetable?

"Here, kitty, kitty, kitty?" asked Heep.

"Why not? It's got fur!" answered the second chief engineer.

And the entire crew -- save those souls holding down the security types -- clustered around Schmeem's last known place of habitation, gently crooning, "Here, kitty, kitty, kitty," while staring up into the ductwork.

It seemed to work. Several centons later, the orange form of "the kitty" became visible. The crew gently backed off, except Heep, who waved a particularly juicy turkoid leg. "Here, kitty," he crooned. And, slowly, Schmeem came down, took the leg in one tentacle, and began again to cook.

Tribblia, Neb, and Symington trundled into the mess hall after a long and puz-

zling tour on the command deck. They stopped cold at the sight of Schmeem -- whom everyone seemed to call "Kitty" -- serving most of the ship's complement with great amounts of steaming...something.

"What the frak?" wondered Trib.

"Hey, gorgeous, try the stuff!" hollered one of the engineering crew. "It's great, whatever it is. We got ourselves a cook!" The entire complement took up the cry.

Schmeem looked around apprehensively. Were the bipeds going to end the feast with it as the main course? No, evidently they were just happy. Oh, well.

Schmeem continued to cook. Trib, et al., advanced to join the feast.

* * * * *

Morpheus, in human form once again, strolled down the main concourse of the ship toward the auxiliary mess hall he usually frequented. It was little used, except for the combat crew, and he could usually rustle up something to eat with a minimum of hassle. Since the auto-chef in his quarters died -- temporarily, he hoped -- he made this a habit. The main mess had those Cylons trying to cook. The best that could be said of them was they were better than any human cook in the crew.

Morpheus nodded absently to the rutabaga-shaped orange thing ambling down the corridor and turned into the auxiliary mess. And stopped.

"Say, what?" he asked himself, turning around. "Command deck," he spoke into his wrist com/comp/clock/whatever.

"Here, sir," promptly came the voice of the dog-watch commander.

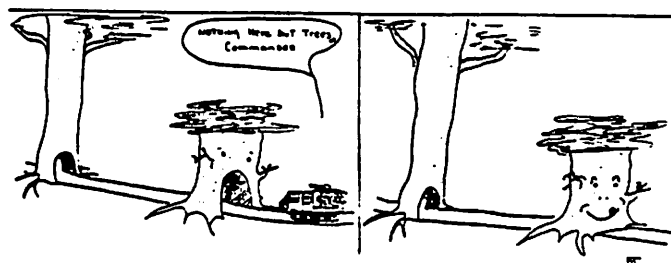
"Scotty, I just saw a large orange rutabaga with tentacles meandering down Concourse A from the auxiliary mess. What in Hades is it?"

"Aye, sir. That's just the new cook. Found him in the auxiliary mess last night, cooking up a storm. Started a bit o' a fracas when the security types tried to stop it, but never fear! We stopped them, and let the wee beastie keep on cooking. Had to lure it down from the ceiling ducts, though. Really good cook, sir, thank the Lords of Fortran. Answers to the name o' "Kitty-Kitty," for some odd reason."

"Kitty- Kitty?" wondered the Commander. At the sound of its new name, Schmeem turned a cluster of baby-blue oculars back toward the Commander. "Hi, Kitty. Nice cook. Anything left for me?" Morpheus was willing to play the game.

"Ullla, HONK," gleefully returned Kitty-Kitty.

"Oh," replied Morpheus. And continued into the auxiliary mess for some delightful leftovers.





"PURPLE AND ORANGE?" CONTEST #2

LOCK ATHENA INTO A CLOSET

Now that I know you guys can handle obnoxious kids and cutesy-puke daggits, it's time to send you after bigger game. Your mission this time: Lock a certain lovely but untalented bridge officer into a closet. The closet's metaphorical -- it could be a box, a paper bag (since we know she can't act her way out of it), or anyplace else where she'll be out of the way. We'll let her out again when Glen Larson learns to write.

THIS TIME, ANYTHING GOES...

Stories, plays, summaries, cartoons, sonnets, footnoted essays, woodcuts, models constructed with popsicle sticks. Please remember I have to read these things and still like you afterward -- so keep them brief and legible. Mail all entries before 31 December 1980 to:

"LOCK ATHENA INTO A CLOSET" Contest
c/o Lisa Golladay
7600 North Bosworth, #617
Chicago, Illinois 60626

I can't return copies of anything, so keep duplicates if you ever want to see your entries alive again. Winners will have the honour of seeing their efforts printed without charge in "Purple and Orange?" Stardom awaits! And the Maren Jensen Fan Club be damned!!

ED. NOTE: The preceeding contest announcement was accompanied by the following threat, submitted in the Humour Editor's own handwriting. She is known to be dangerous and unstable. Therefore, we can only assume she means it.

WARNING!! I excepted myself from the last contest, but this time I reserve the right to interfere. If things get slow here in OSIRISland, I just might enter my version, a musical western on Dune in which Athena is mistaken for a Bene Gesserit and fed to a sandworm. (Yes, she remains intact and unharmed; it's my contest.) Among the production numbers:

Yippie Ki Yi Oh!
Git inside, lil' Athena.
You know that a sandworm
Will be your new home.

And the strange, haunting:

I walk the sands near thumper stands
And scan the land for sandworms,
Big, mean sandworms.

ED. NOTE: Needless to say, we urge our readers to submit as many entries as possible, lest our Humour Editor take things into her own hands.



"The Demon"

(By Lisa Golladay)

Freya's Log -- Specific Confidential: Retrieval by all personnel except Sergeant A.

Last night was priceless. Ordinarily, of course, I'd be incensed at finding Sergeant A. drunk and naked in my quarters. The fact that he was clinging to the ceiling air vents and muttering ancient incantations to ward off the Evil Eye made the discovery tolerable. Apparently Clem tried to play with his tail. A. doesn't have a tail, but Clem doesn't ask questions before striking...

"Pass some more ambrosia, laddie..."

A.'s drunken song echoed off the empty corridors of the OSIRIS Q Deck. The hour was absurd. This was to A.'s advantage, since in his condition he was sure to collide with any moving target.

It started with a few drinks in the Game Room. Then an adjournment to the Officers' Club. Then a hard-core rag-tag group retired to Lavanna's quarters to demolish her private stock of Arian Quartz Distillate. Somewhere along the way, they started telling ghost stories, dredging up legends from the roughly three-score civilisations catalogued in the ship's sentiological banks. The stories alone would have slightly warped the average young Warrior's mind. But then, A. was not the average young Warrior, and the stories were not acting alone. Baleron estimated A.'s condition to be "stewed beyond the point of mummification" when the giggling pilots staggered out of Lavanna's and toward their own quarters.

Well, mostly toward their own quarters. A. wandered lost and oblivious for about a centar before finding the unsealed pilots' section. He ricocheted off the corridor walls and made a triumphant left turn into a row of doorways. It was triumphant because Lavanna had said he'd never make it home in his condition. A., who knew he wasn't all that drunk, knew better.

But not better enough. He should have turned right.

With great mental effort, the Warrior counted three -- yes, all of three -- doors and stumbled against the lock. He stumbled against it again. Then yet again. Finally, he hit the lock with the butt of his laser and lurched through the open door. Following usual circuit patterns, the door closed and locked behind him.

Too sloshed to turn on a light, A. began removing his uniform, carefully lofting each item into the air and letting it settle gently on the floor. He was considerably incapable of seeing the small, furry thing with ever-widening eyes follow his every step. Clem, the Byzelian bast, the bast who only looked like a bast, contemplated angles of attack.

A. reached the bed and his shorts at the same time. The shorts hit the air, A. hit the bed, and Clem's already offended territorial imperative reached critical mass.

"MERRRRRRRRROWWWWWWWEEEEERRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRROOOOOOOOWWW!"

A.'s eyes opened as swiftly as possible under the circumstances.

"RRooooorrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrOW!"

The intensity of the battle cry increased. On Byzel, the Cry of Imminent Murderous Intent was a strictly regulated ritual. On the OSIRIS, the cry sounded like the banshee yell Baleron so lamely approximated centars earlier.

"MROW!"

A. saw the shorts flying. Then he heard the sound of fabric shredding. Then something running. Across the floors. Halfway up the walls! Something made of glass fell and shattered. A strange ripping sound -- the sound of velcro dying.

Clem was warming up.

A. lay immobile. His body couldn't have moved if he'd wanted it to, but he certainly didn't want it to. Brain fog prevented him from convincing himself that those stories were only stories. Weren't they?

Clem, having turned A.'s pants into a pile of interesting fibre, lost interest in textiles and approached the subject of her wrath.

"Murp?"

A. sat upright. That sound was awfully close.

"Murrow?"

Fur! A. felt fur! He jumped upright, shrieking.

"Holy frak! Whatever you are, I mean you no harm! For the Lords' sake!"

Clem watched. Her eyes glittered more excitedly. A. saw them, yelped incoherently, and bolted toward the door.

"MMMMMMMMERRRRROW!"

"Yelp!"

One last Cry of Insane Claw Sharpening, and Clem began the attack.

"GRAP!" and she had his ankles. She rebounded before A. knew what happened -- his reflexes were a bit slow. By the time he yelped in pain, she had his neck.

Swipe!

And she was off his neck and ricocheting off the mattress, bouncing with all four paws aimed straight ahead at A.'s face. Pound, swipe, and off again.

"Holy Lords of Kobol and all deities great and minor! Hellllllp!"

A., too, began ricocheting off the walls. It was still dark, his eyes still refused to focus, and this...thing...kept springing from nowhere. He slammed into the door. It wouldn't open. Clem slammed into A. His skin opened. Blood excited the Byzelian bast's Chaos Drive. She pressed the attack.

"Aieeeeeeeeeeeee!"

"Ieoooooooooooo!"

Clem had never played triad before, but she caught on rapidly. Her cries and A.'s cries intermingled after a while, and the ringing sounds of flesh bouncing off walls added percussion. Clem began singing the Cry of Intense Attack Pleasure, which A. mistook for the Valkyries. He shrieked in terror once again and leapt into a corner, huddling on the carpet with his arms shielding his face. He whimpered softly.

"Rurmp?" A small furry head inspected his huddled form. "Mrowp?"

The whimpering sounded quite similar to the Croon of Playful Intent. Clem inspected the quivering Warrior. Well, if he really wanted to...

The bast planted herself in the centre of the room. She waited silently. Her prey slowly rose, cringing and peering into the darkness.

No demons. He was safe.

A., shaking and staggering and muttering about alcoholic overindulgence, shook his head, tested the functions of his arms and legs, and tried to make his way bedward. A step. Another. Faster steps. He reached the centre of the room when, just at his feet...

"ROWROWROWROWROWROWROW!!!!!!!" The Cry of Playful Greeting.

"Holy frak! Noooooooooo!"

A.'s shriek died to a lingering whine as he leapt straight into the air. He didn't leap quite fast enough. Something dangled.

Swipe!

"Aiiirrrrgh! Arrrrrrrrrrgh! Aieeeeeeeeeeeeeee! Owwwwwww!"

Gosh, thought Clem. She'd never heard ritual cries like that before. A. clung to the ceiling, moaning in pain but terrified of returning to ground level.

Well, if he's going to be like that, Clem thought, he can stay there. And the bast hopped onto her (defiled) bed, curled up on the pillow, and dozed. "Damn funny place for a tail," she thought briefly before falling asleep.

A. hung. Alcohol, pain, and a rather thorough mental confusion made him totally incoherent by the time Freya came home to her quarters after a long -- and late -- patrol.

"What in the...? Holy frak!" Freya surveyed the damage -- and the dangling corpse -- as Clem rubbed her legs in greeting.

"How in blazes did he get...?" At that moment, a whimper emanated from the corpse. It wasn't dead yet. Freya started to bawl out the naked, blood-stained Sergeant (Naked? Clinging to the ceiling? Good Lords, what is Purple Squadron coming to?), but she soon realised he wasn't paying attention. In fact, he looked rather, uh, sick. Freya scooped Clem onto her shoulder and crossed the debris carefully. She activated the communications console.

"Life Centre," said the voice on the other end.

"Lavanna, this is Freya. Send a stretcher and a couple med techs to my quarters." Freya appraised the suspended Warrior. "And a ladder."

"A ladder?"

"Don't ask questions, Lavanna. And," a smile crossed the Lieutenant's face, "come over here yourself."

The procession was an unusual one. Morgan, passing near Life Centre on one of his visits to Diana (recovering from a fainting spell), understood Arkas and Kastor carrying the stretcher (probably another brawl), but why was Gunnery Sergeant Jones carrying a ladder? And why did Lavanna smile so broadly and check the light metre on her camera? Why, for that matter, did she have a camera? Morgan decided to follow, stopping just short of the door when the assemblage entered Freya's quarters.

"Sagan's sacroilliac!" Arkas whispered under his breath.

"Freya," Lavanna asked, "what did you do to him?"

"Me? I didn't touch the little twerp." Freya glanced at Clem, who yawned.

"Oh," Lavanna giggled.

A. was vaguely aware of an increased level of light and noise in the room. He was still drunk. That was the least of his problems. By the Lords, this room looked like it was upside down!

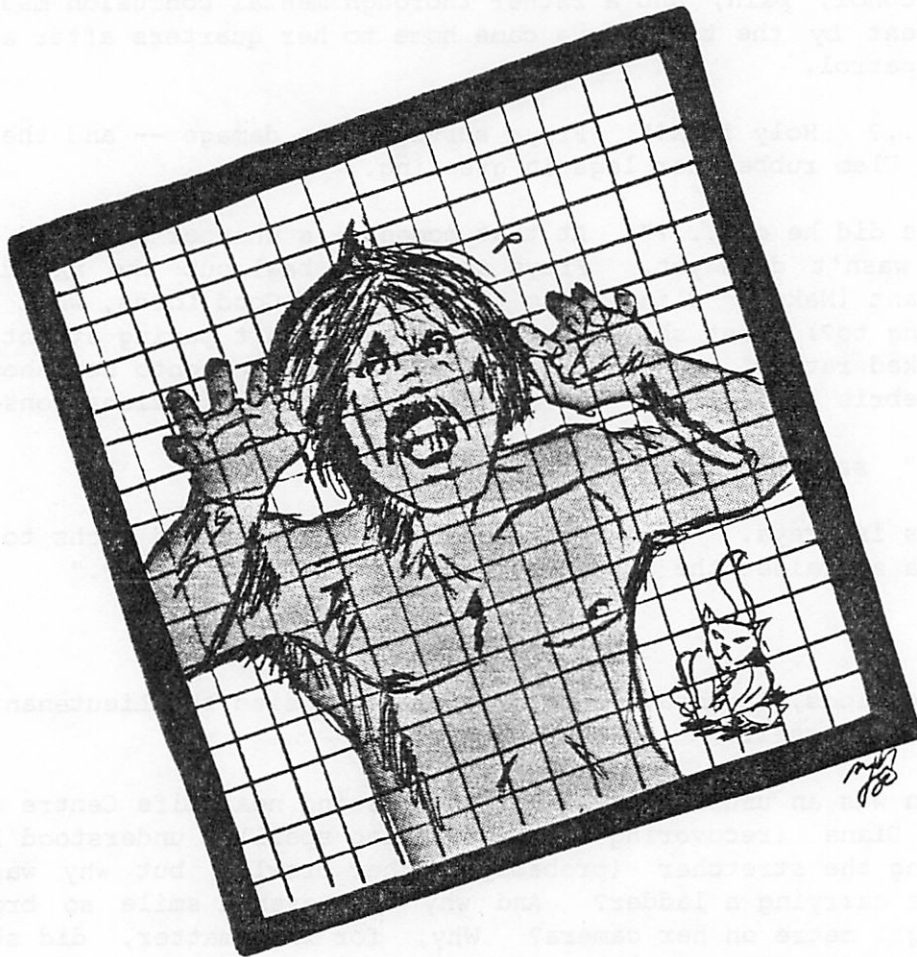
Kastor stared open-mouthed at the "patient in need of transport."

"How do we get him down?"

"Leave that to me," Jones boomed. "You got me out of bed for this, did you?"

He stared at Freya. She nodded nervously.

"Thank you," he said. Jones then ordered the med techs to hold the stretcher under A., took out his #12 spanner, and pounded the vents off. By the time A.



landed, he'd fainted dead away.

"My ceiling!" Freya cried.

"We'll fix it," Jones replied.

Lavanna was laughing so hard she could barely order the stunned Arkas and Kastor back to Life Centre. A. stirred slightly, just as Clem, emerging from under the bed, commented to Freya about the noise. "Rowrup!"

"Aaah, noooo! Please, nooooooo!" And A. fainted again.

Five centons later, when Lavanna had peeled herself off the floor and stopped laughing, she threw a blanket across the body. The procession and cargo left Freya's and started back to Life Centre. Morgan, no longer worried about detection, stared. What had happened to Sergeant A.? He glanced toward Freya's door, told himself that was impossible, and returned his stare toward the stretcher.

"Murp?"

Morgan looked down and saw Clem. Strange animal. Did she...?

Clem looked up sweetly. Morgan looked back. Surprisingly enough...

Freya gathered the remains of A.'s uniform and stuffed them into a small paper bag. She swept up the broken glass and pottery. Jones, who lingered, asked her if she'd bring charges against the intruder.

"No," she said, leaning on the broom and staring briefly into space. "Instead, I'll let him stew." She returned to the communications console.

"Lavanna? I want you to make sure A. never finds out what really happened to-night. Okay?"

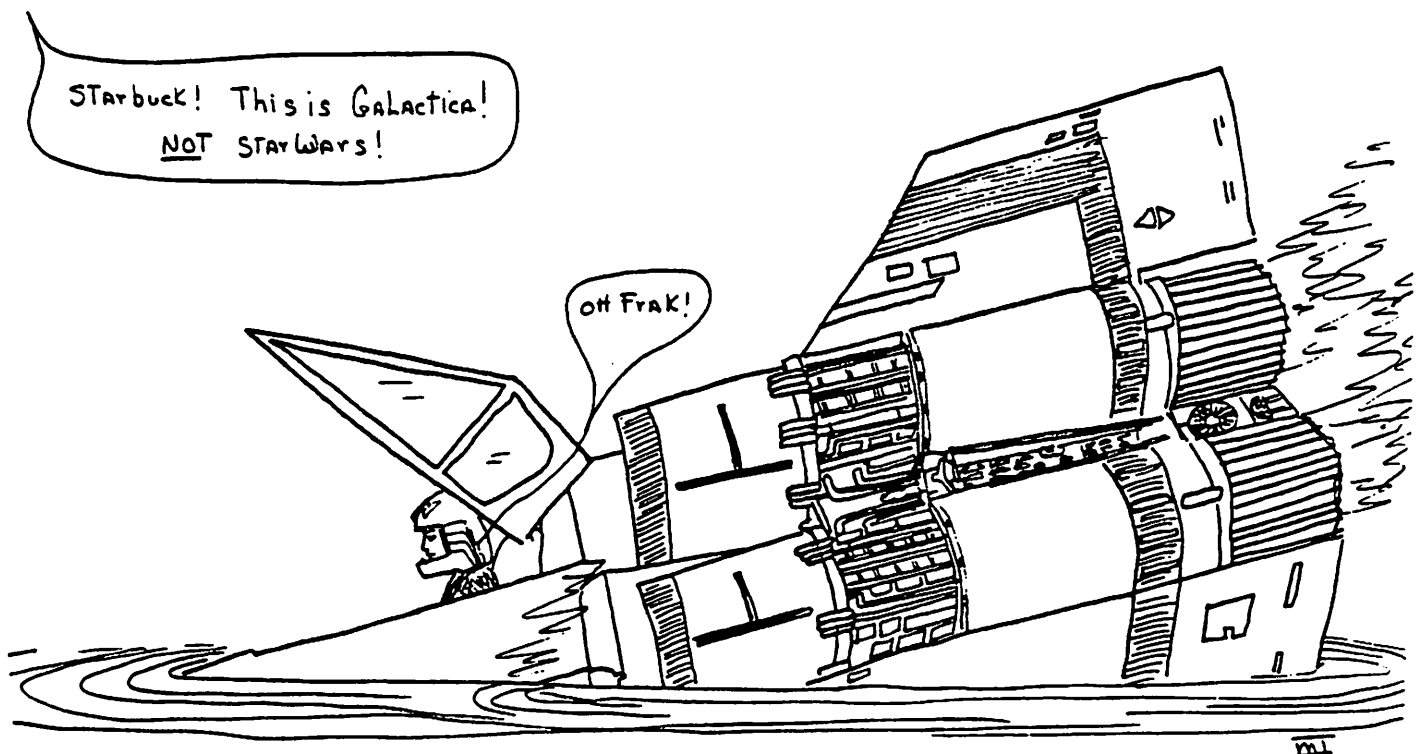
Lavanna nodded, too nearly on the verge of cracking up to say anything. The kid might never enter his quarters again. Freya returned to her disaster clean-up. Jones left.

On his way out the door, Jones broke stride and contemplated a very strange sight. There was Clem, licking a forepaw and clearly satisfied with herself -- and there was Morgan, bent over on his knees, howling with laughter. Jones shrugged and kept walking. Morgan always was a strange one.

Morgan, for his part, was too busy laughing at Clem's story to notice he'd established a psychic link with a bast. First, he had to tell Diana...

Unfortunately, Clem has been wandering the halls of late, apparently looking for A. He'll get released from Life Centre in a few days, and I don't want to be around when she finds him.

Clem wasn't sure, but A.'s last cry of terror had sounded awfully similar to the Cry of Male Lust. She'd just have to investigate...



WARRIORS' PRAYER

(Recorded by Cadet Reisa)

Oh, Lords of Kobol, hear our prayer
For those who've fought and not returned,
Whose spirits roam through cold, dark space,
Who gave their lives that we might live.

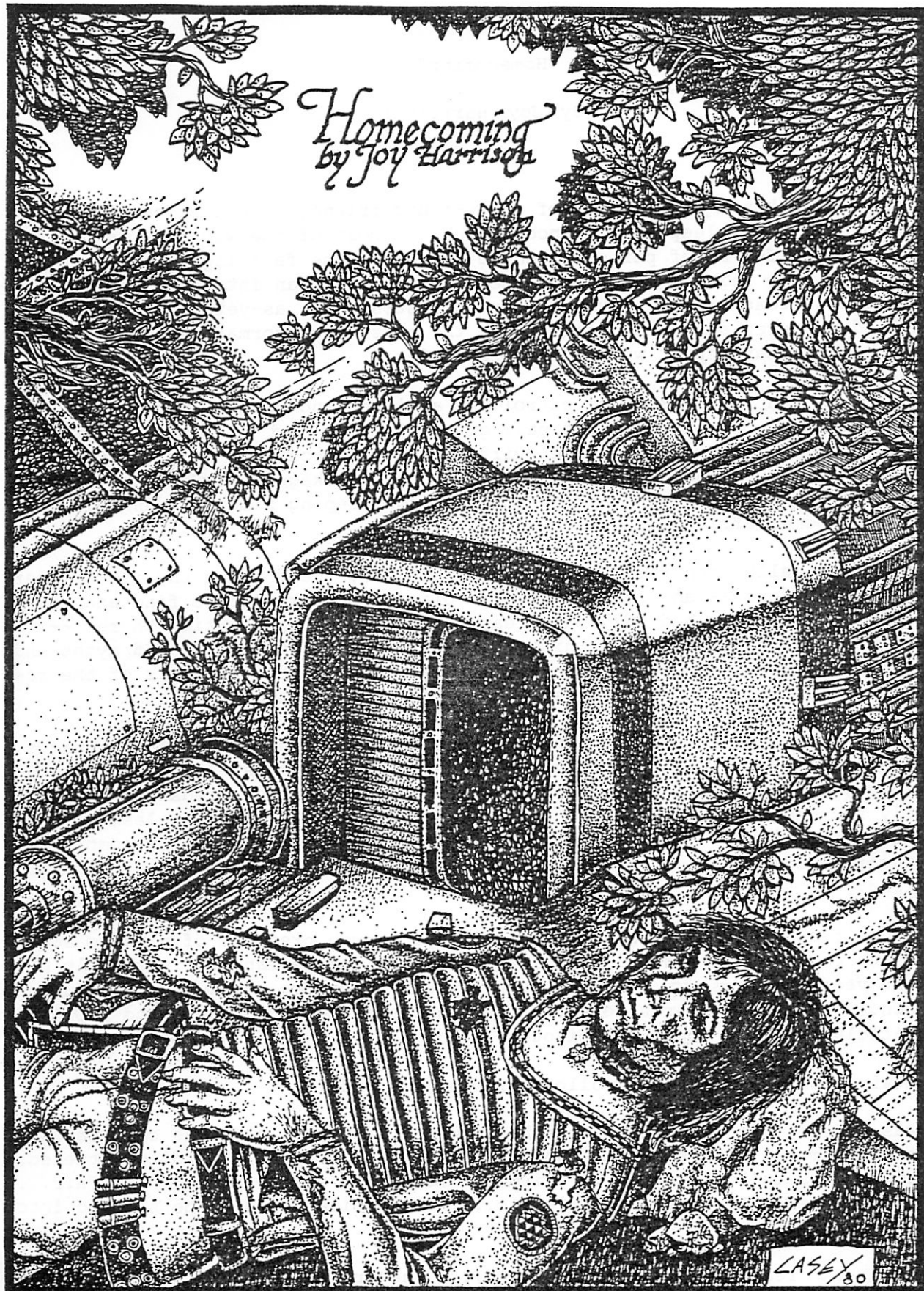
Numerous are the ranks of foe,
Small and slim our own defence.
Cylons follow where'er we go,
Seeking to end the race of Man.

Bravely our Warriors sally forth,
Uncomplaining of the price.
Their fierce spirit is our defence;
It seems our Vipers, they multiply.

Yet all do not always return,
As ship and man die among the stars.
As their spirits go to eternity,
We'll give them a Cylon honour guard.

Oh, Lords of Kobol, hear our prayer
For those who've fought and not returned.
We pray that we will always be
Worthy of their great sacrifice.

Homecoming
by Joy Harrison



"Homecoming"

(By Joy Harrison)

Very badly shaken by the death of a new-found friend, and near total exhaustion, Apollo was asleep -- or unconscious -- most of the way back to the GALACTICA. The few brief periods when he was awake, he felt lightheaded, dizzy, feverish. The pain in his right side was no longer an intermittent warning; it became a steady reminder of too great a strain on as-yet unhealed tissue. His mind wandered again and again over the bits of information he'd gathered during the centars spent with Shimarbron Godas.

Apollo had run into the Cylon patrol by accident and managed to destroy five of them before one of the last pair got behind him and nearly destroyed his ship. Badly hurt, with his Viper virtually out of control, he'd crashed on a remote planet -- and would have died in the wreckage, if Shimarbron Godas hadn't found him and looked after him, somehow keeping him alive until Starbuck and Boomer arrived to take him home.

When he'd finally been released from Life Centre, he'd taken the recon Viper -- against orders -- and returned to the planet, determined to find and thank his benefactor. He had only one clear memory of his first time there -- a reptilian face seen before on history scans, in recordings of old myths and legends. The face of a Cylon, a living descendant of the creators of the robots who'd destroyed the Colonies. This time, the face of a friend.

Apollo had found his Cylon. They'd begun to learn one another's languages, customs, history -- and they'd become friends. Then, just before Apollo had to leave, they'd been attacked by some sort of local feline predator. Momentarily stunned in the creature's first attack, Apollo had nevertheless managed to kill it -- but not before it had mortally wounded his Cylon companion. Shimarbron Godas died in Apollo's arms, speaking his name and calling him, "friend."

C.O.R.A. flew the Viper unaided. Apollo had enough presence of mind to activate the computer when he climbed into the ship, and he managed reasonably coherent verbal orders to return to the GALACTICA before he passed out during launch. The recon Viper streaked through space at maximum speed, and C.O.R.A. repeatedly tried to rouse her pilot.

"Captain Apollo? Captain Apollo! Please respond!"

It was several long centons before he answered. When he did, the computer was unable to make much sense of what he said. "He's dead," Apollo muttered. "Dead... Couldn't help him... Tried... Lords, it's not fair... Not fair... So much to tell, to learn... Tried to..." His voice faded as he slipped into an uneasy sleep.

Lacking any real human emotions, C.O.R.A. nevertheless sounded deeply concerned as she tried repeatedly to rouse Apollo once more. He periodically

mumbled a few incoherent words -- not always in a language the computer knew -- then drifted off again.

The messages transmitted to the GALACTICA as the recon Viper neared scanner range sounded more and more urgent. "Recon Viper One to GALACTICA. Come in, GALACTICA. Recon Viper One to GALACTICA. Please come in..."

Then, at last, "This is GALACTICA Core Control. What is your status, Recon Viper One?"

"We will be in visual range of the Fleet in ten point three centons," C.O.R.A. reported. "Fuel gauges read empty. Pilot is incapacitated."

"Injured?"

"No data. He appears delirious. At present, he is asleep."

"Try to wake him," Core Control instructed. "Alpha Landing Bay will be prepared for emergency landing."

Apollo was awake, though still somewhat groggy, by the time the GALACTICA was in sight. He felt terrible, but was pretty sure he could land the ship safely. C.O.R.A. didn't agree.

"You should let me take us in, Captain," she said. "You're not well, and..."

Apollo didn't say a word as he switched off the computer, but his hands shook slightly when he reached for the controls.

"Recon Viper One, this is GALACTICA Core Control. We have you on short-range scanner. You are cleared for emergency landing in Alpha Bay."

"Acknowledged, Core Control," Apollo replied. "Thank you."

"Captain Apollo, you will report to the Commander immediately upon landing."

Adama's voice was icy, and Apollo, sick as he was, recognised the tone. His father sounded more than a little angry, and Apollo couldn't really blame him. The Flight Commander of the GALACTICA had disobeyed orders, stolen a Viper... The list of charges was awesome; there'd probably be a tribunal...

Well, Apollo reflected, he deserved it. He'd known what he was doing, and he knew the consequences. He'd face them, too -- but first, he had to land. He steered the Viper carefully, using her forward momentum instead of fuel -- and hoping there would be enough reverse thrust to stop the ship.

The landing was far from perfect. Despite assistance from the reactivated C.O.R.A., the approach was unsteady. The ship skidded on the deck and struck a stanchion, shearing off one wing and crumpling the port engine. Apollo's head struck the canopy. He was unconscious when C.O.R.A. shut down the engines.

The Viper's shaky initial approach had been noted on the bridge. The Commander, who was quite familiar with the abilities of all his pilots, knew some-

thing was wrong. He was in the landing bay before the ship came to a halt.

Adama himself opened the canopy and unfastened his son's flight harness. He touched Apollo's cheek lightly, then checked for a pulse and signalled the med techs.

Two men lifted Apollo from the cockpit and carefully lowered him to the deck. Within microns, he was on a stretcher and headed for Life Centre, Adama right beside him. When he opened his eyes only a few centons later, the first thing Apollo saw was his father's worried face.

"I'm all right, father," he whispered. "Really."

"We'll let Dr. Salik judge that," Adama replied, taking his son's trembling hand tightly in his own.

Apollo sighed wearily and closed his eyes. "He's dead, father. He died saving my life. I couldn't help him..." His voice broke off, and he choked back a sob.

"Later, Apollo," Adama said softly. "Rest now." He sat down beside the bed and with one hand smoothed his son's hair. "Try to sleep."

"No..." Apollo's eyes were bright with unshed tears as he stared at his father, not really seeing him. "He was so good, so gentle. And so wise. He wanted to help us. I..." He tried to sit up, and Adama gently pushed him back against the pillows.

"I said, 'later.'" The Commander's tone was stern, not matching the fatherly concern in his eyes. He began to stroke Apollo's hair again, soothingly, comfortingly. "I want you to rest. You can tell me what happened later, after you've had some sleep."

Apollo obediently closed his eyes again. Within microns, he was asleep.

"Commander..."

Adama looked up at Dr. Salik, who was standing on the other side of Apollo's bed. "Yes, doctor? You have a report?"

"I don't know what Captain Apollo's been doing, Commander, or where he's been, but he's been through a great deal of stress. He has a slight fever, and he appears totally exhausted. Physically, he's not too badly hurt, although he's going to be rather uncomfortable for the next few days. Emotionally, however..."

"Yes?"

"As I said, Commander, I do not know what's happened. But Captain Apollo has experienced some sort of severe emotional trauma. I do not know its nature, and I do not know how easily or how quickly he will recover from it. Right now, though, what he needs most is rest."

"I see." Adama nodded. "Thank you, doctor." As Salik walked away, the Com-

mander looked down at his son for a moment, then called to the doctor, "I'll stay here for a while. Then I will be on the bridge if you need me." Once more, he took Apollo's hand in his own. "Why, Apollo?" he asked silently. "What was so important?"

* * * * *

Apollo slept deeply for nearly twenty centars and felt a great deal better when he finally awoke. He sat up carefully, feeling somewhat lightheaded, and Cassiopeia came to his side.

"How do you feel, Apollo?"

"Not too bad. Just a little sore."

"Only a little?"

He grinned sheepishly. "Well, maybe a bit more than a little."

"How's your head?"

"Aches." He frowned. "What happened?"

"You hit something when you landed. The recon Viper looks a bit mangled."

It was his turn. "Only a bit?"

Cassiopeia laughed. "Actually, I think your ship's only a little more damaged than you are. But you'll fly again -- and Starbuck says the Viper will, too."

"Where is Starbuck?" Apollo tried to get up, but he moved too quickly; the room suddenly seemed to spin around him. Cassiopeia held him for a moment, then firmly pushed him back on the bed.

"Take it easy, Captain. Dr. Salik wants you to stay in bed for a while."

Apollo closed his eyes, and the spinning stopped. He sighed. "All right, Cassiopeia. I don't really feel like going anywhere just now, anyway."

He suddenly looked so unhappy, so alone -- and, somehow, so terribly vulnerable... Cassiopeia put a hand lightly on his shoulder. "Feel like visitors, Apollo? I'll call your father and let him know you're awake."

He smiled faintly. "Thanks. I'd like that. And will you tell Starbuck and Boomer, too? There's something I'd like them all to hear."

She nodded, then left. Apollo sighed again. There was so much to tell...

"Apollo?"

He opened his eyes. "Hello, Starbuck."

"How're you feeling, buddy?"

"I'm okay. Where's Boomer?"

"With the Commander. They should be here any micron."

"The Viper?"

"Looking even worse than you do." Starbuck grinned. "You did a good job. But don't worry. Dr. Wilker says she'll be ready to fly again in about a secton."

"And C.O.R.A.? She brought us both home."

"Not damaged at all. Just making sarcastic remarks about pilots who haven't enough sense to leave everything to her."

Apollo sighed in relief. "Thank the Lords! I was afraid..."

"Hey, who cares about a Viper, anyway? It's a lot more important that you're all right." Starbuck grinned again, trying to tease his friend out of his obvious depression. "But you sure don't look it. Maybe C.O.R.A.'s right. You look like a refugee from..."

The arrival of Adama and Boomer interrupted Starbuck and prevented any retort from Apollo, who held out a hand to forestall the inevitable question about his health. "Before either of you ask, I'm fine," he told them.

"You don't look fine," Boomer observed. "You look beat."

Apollo grinned fleetingly. "I'm just a little tired, Boomer, that's all."

"Ha!" Starbuck snorted skeptically.

Boomer glanced at Adama out of the corner of his eye. The Commander's face was carefully expressionless, something Boomer judged a very bad sign for Apollo. On the way to Life Centre, Adama hadn't said a word about his son -- another bad sign. Boomer wondered if Apollo knew how much trouble he was really in. "Uh, Captain..."

"What is it, Boomer?" Apollo's eyes gave Boomer his answer; the Captain knew.

"If you'll pardon my sayin' it, what you did was incredibly stupid. Sir."

Apollo sighed. "I know, Boomer. I know."

"It was more than stupid," the Commander said coldly. "It was criminal. The Flight Commander is the senior combat pilot aboard a battlestar -- and his conduct is expected to set a high example. Not only did you endanger your own life; you also risked a highly valuable, possibly irreplaceable, piece of equipment. Given all that, your flagrant disobedience..."

"Father," Apollo interrupted, leaning forward intently, "will you please stop talking like some kind of military law tape and listen to me? I had to do it. I didn't have any choice." His face ashen, he collapsed back against the pillows, his strength suddenly gone. "I know it sounds crazy, but..."

Adama's eyes showed concern, but his expression remained cold, forbidding. He folded his arms silently.

"You told me that, too, Apollo," Starbuck said. "And I still don't understand it."

"Will you all please just listen to me?" Tired, Apollo closed his eyes for a micron, his frustration evident. "I want to tell you what happened. I can't really explain it, but maybe you'll understand why it was so necessary for me to go back."

"I think," Adama began, his voice still icy, "any explanation had best wait for the tribunal, Captain."

"No, father. It won't wait. I've got to tell you now, while it's all still fresh in my mind."

"Apollo, I should not even be here talking to you. Your physical condition upon landing is the only reason you were not immediately placed under arrest. As soon as you are released from Life Centre, you will be confined in the GALACTICA brig to await the tribunal."

"Father, please. I'm afraid I may forget something, and it's all so terribly important..."

The desperate intensity in Apollo's voice, combined with a father's deep concern, was more than Adama could withstand. "Very well, Apollo." He sat down carefully on the edge of the bed; Starbuck and Boomer stood behind him, both managing to look simultaneously relieved and worried. "Tell me your story."

"Starbuck knew where I was going," Apollo began, looking at his father. "You guessed, too, didn't you?"

"Yes -- back to the planet where you crashed."

"I wanted to find the Cylon. After I landed, I found a trail in the wreckage and followed it..."

* * * * *

There was silence for a long time after Apollo finished his story. Adama's voice broke the stillness. "I think I understand now why you deliberately disobeyed me. Unfortunately, I will still be forced to convene a tribunal."

"That's not really important, father. I mean, I did disobey direct orders, after all, and..."

"Enough! I'm sure all charges can be dropped, and you will receive no more than a formal reprimand. The information you've brought back is of such great potential value... You realise, of course, that understanding their creators may give us a clue to a means of finally defeating the Cylons?"

Apollo nodded. "But there was so much more..."

"I know," Adama said gently. "But there was nothing you could do."

"If I'd fired sooner..."

"You'd probably have missed," Starbuck retorted. "Apollo, you can't blame yourself for the Cylon's death."

"But if I hadn't been there, if I hadn't gone back..."

"You're the one who said you had no choice, Captain," Boomer pointed out reasonably.

"I know, but..."

"Apollo, shut up already," Starbuck snapped in irritation. "We've had just about enough..."

"Apollo," Adama interrupted, glaring at Starbuck, "remember what the Cylon told you about the relationship between past and future?"

Apollo frowned thoughtfully. "He said past and future had to meet, so the future could learn from the past, and so the past could help the future come into being."

"Past and future cannot coexist," the Commander said. "Your friend said you represent the future; he represented the past. And you learned a great deal from him, didn't you?"

"I hope so," Apollo replied quietly.

"Well, I think the Cylon saved your life so you could return to us with what you'd learned. In dying as he did, to protect you, he may very well have made our future possible."

Apollo nodded. "Maybe..."

"Captain, I want you to record a complete report for me, everything you can remember about your conversations with the Cylon, everything that happened, everything he told you, no matter how trivial." The information would be extremely valuable -- and talking about it, even (or maybe especially) to a computer, would be good therapy for Apollo.

"Yes, sir."

"And, Captain, I want that report before the tribunal convenes. Its contents may well determine the outcome."

"You'll have it," Apollo promised.

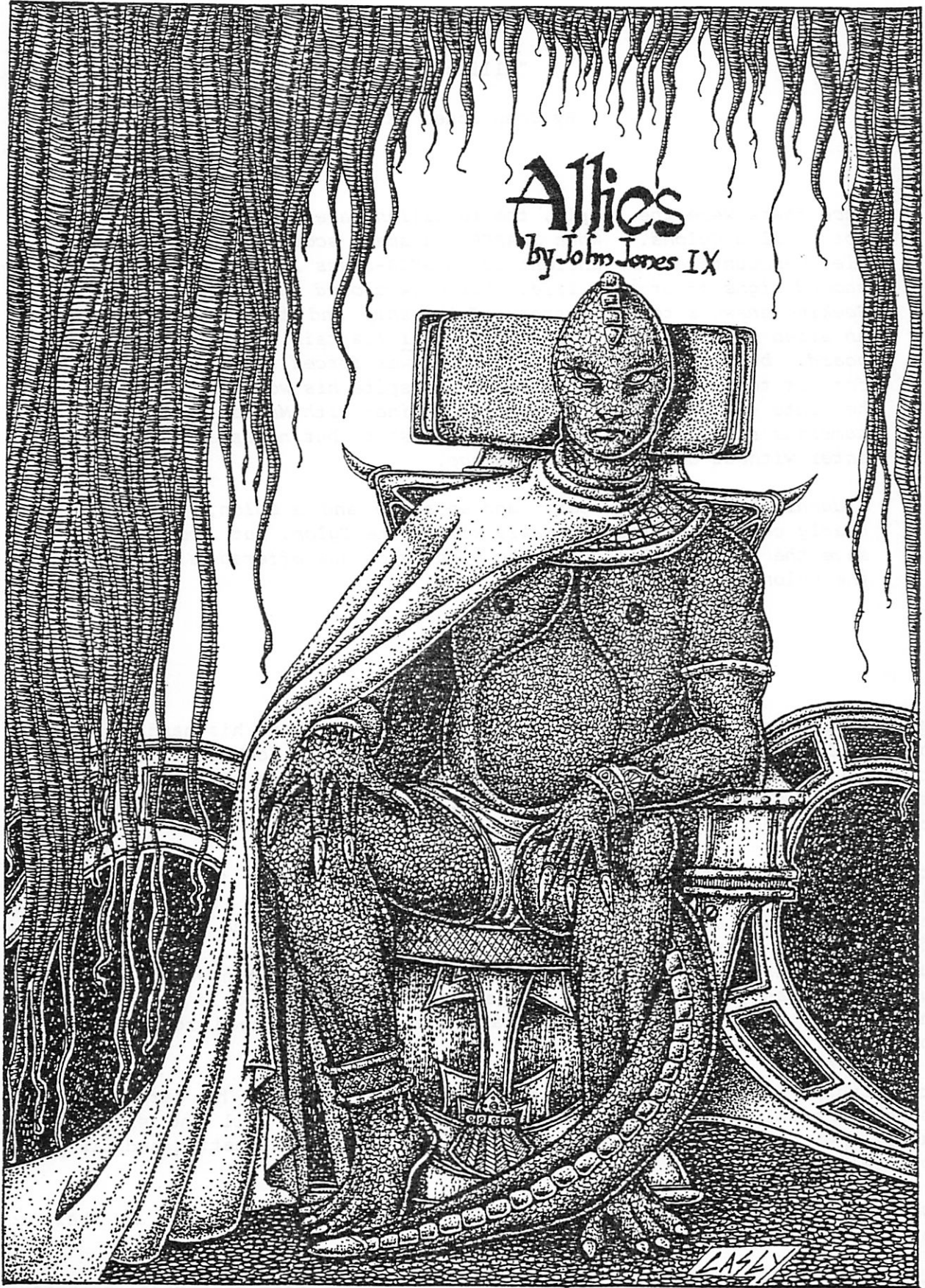
"And, Apollo..."

"Yes, father?"

"Don't do it again. Please!"

Allies

by John Jones IX



"Allies"

(By John Jones IX)

Once there were the People, the reptilian race who created the robots called Cylons. When SHARER, a small scout ship of the People, encountered an ancient Cylon SEGA-class liner whose debris showed signs of organic life, her crew closed in to investigate. Seeking answers to the mystery of the ship and to the identity of an alien body found in the debris, Nai (Captain) Urun prepared to board, but while making preparations was forced to admit his love for his technician, Makra Dakal. Despite his worry about taking her into danger, Urun crossed to the liner with Makra. There were numerous signs of activity within the ship, but no apparent way to enter without doing too much damage.

Suddenly a hatch flew open, and an alien and a Cylon, locked in deadly combat, emerged. Makra killed the Cylon, but too late to save the alien. However, the open hatch now offered a way into the Cylon ship...

PART V

Nai Urun lowered himself through the hatchway and shone his handlight around the inside of the improvised airlock in the SEGA's double hull. It still looked as cramped as an egg cell in the ancient Burrows of Nagonar. In the yellow-white glow, he studied the inner hatch and discovered something new about it.

It wasn't locked at all. It opened inward, and now it was held firmly in place by the pressure of the atmosphere inside the ship. The pressure might be enough to keep anyone outside from opening a way into the Cylon ship. Even if it wasn't, there might be aliens just beyond the hatch, possibly without suits. If there were, they might very well die if the hatch was opened. The outer hatch was gone for good, so opening the inner one would open everything in the ship between it and the nearest airtight bulkhead to the vacuum of space.

Urun studied the inner hatch until he'd worked out what he earnestly hoped would be a solution, then climbed back out onto the hull and signalled to Makra. With their helmets touching, he explained the situation and his plans for dealing with it.

"We'll be closer together than I like for a while, but what else is there to do?"

Even in the spacesuit, he could see her shrug at that rhetorical question.

"Give up?"

"Not egg-breaking likely!"

He handed her all his loose gear except the disruptor, then tied a double line from his belt to hers. Paying the lines out carefully behind him, he climbed back down into the airlock, then raised the disruptor. Two quick bursts at medium power cut through the springs of the inner hatch. Now there was absolutely nothing holding the hatch in place except the pressure of the air inside.

Urun pushed gently and felt the hatch give slightly. He pushed harder, and saw water vapour form whitely as air gushed out along the edges of the hatch. He also felt his boot magnets beginning to pull loose from the airlock wall under the strain. He got them fixed again, then tugged three times on the lines as a signal to Makra for what he was about to do next.

He shifted position until he was standing on the hatch itself, with one hand gripping the nearest handle on the wall. Then, in one smooth motion, he switched on his rocket pack and bent over until the nozzles were pointing out into space. The airlock filled with fumes as the thrust built up -- then he felt the hatch giving way under his feet as the thrust of the rockets exceeded the pressure of the air inside. The hatch began to slide away from under him; air poured out to blast away the fumes; then in a single moment the hatch swung past its balance point and dropped Urun into the Cylon ship.

Without stopping, he grabbed the edge of the hatch with one hand and looped his belt lines around the nearest object sticking out far enough to provide a good anchor. Then he jerked twice on the free portion of the lines. Fumes swirled around Urun again as Makra shot through the hatch under the thrust of her rocket pack. She came so fast that she fetched up against the far bulkhead with a resounding crash. Urun slammed the hatch, twisted the locking wheel until it would go no farther, then let out a sigh of relief and turned to Makra.

He let out a bigger sigh when she stood up and signalled that she was all right. They touched helmets.

"We're in!" he said. It was a foolish remark, and he knew it. He also knew he was feeling just a trifle lightheaded at having finally penetrated the SEGA's barriers and being in a position to start dragging her secrets out of her.

"Now what?"

"Try to find the nearest fight."

"Wouldn't it be better to let it come to us? We've probably made enough noise to let the whole ship know we're here."

"That depends on how much noise the Cylons and the aliens are making. Also, I'd rather be a moving target." He looked at his atmosphere analysis kit. It confirmed what SHARER's instruments had already learned from the first leaks. The aliens breathed the same sort of oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere as the People,

although it had slightly more oxygen and much more water vapour. The aliens' home world must have oceans like Ekmarn or Harso; probably most of the People would find it uncomfortably damp.

The pressure was low, but enough to support trained and acclimated Scouts like Urun and Makra. The area had been open to space for no more than a single minute, if that long. Some air had undoubtedly been lost, but not more than a few minutes' breathing for either aliens or People. That was hardly enough to matter. With a pitched battle between aliens and Cylons going on, dying of lack of air was a rather remote danger.

Urun took off his gloves, then opened the free-breathing valve on his helmet. It would have been more comfortable to take off the whole helmet, but he was not going to walk bareheaded into a battle with the Cylons. Makra did the same. Then he moved out in front of her, and they started down the passageway that stretched off to the right. Both had their guns out and charged.

They found no targets in the passageway, but much which was just as interesting and a good deal less dangerous. Urun knew his feeling of relief at this was more for Makrala than for himself -- so much more that it was really a weakness. It wasn't a dangerous weakness now, but when they'd paired off...?

That question was impossible to answer now, and it also raised a few new questions -- such as why did he think when rather than if? It had been years since he found himself being that certain something good would happen.

Once again, he hammered his thoughts into a more workmanlike form. This time, he used as a mental discipline the need to analyse what the passageway implied about the ship.

There'd been fighting along here. He saw two laser-melts and a neat hole that might have been punched by some solid-projectile weapon. Not long ago, either -- the smell of burning was still in the thin air. One of the lasers had exposed, then fused, circuitry, and Urun stopped to study this for a moment.

The SEGA was even older than they'd expected -- or at least her circuitry was. These were Class Two-Six-K components, which the Cylons hadn't used even in the last two generations of SEGAs, let alone in any of their vessels since. This ship had to be closer to four hundred than three hundred standard years old -- and he still had no more idea of where she'd been or what she'd been doing during those centuries than he'd had when they first sighted her.

They moved on down the passageway. Urun kept his mind on his work, but he couldn't keep a bit of history entirely out of his thoughts. When this SEGA was built, both Cylons and People built their ships and everything else to last. The Cylons had few natural resources; the People saw the future stretching endlessly ahead of them; and both sides were at peace with each other.

Now there was war -- not continuous, not universal, but spreading far across inhabited space, flaring up savagely from time to time, and taking a steady toll of ships. The Cylons ruled a hundred worlds and all their resources; they could build cheap ships and throw them away. For the Cylons, there would always be a new day and a new planet's resources for building new ships. But

the People hardly built ships at all now. When they thought of tomorrow, they thought of new dangers and new defeats.

Those were not ideas you could keep caged in a corner of your mind like a Pushrungan crawler, unless you were a telepath like Makralla. Urun turned back to look at her, and she smiled and gave him the wrists-crossed signal of encouragement.

Suddenly his mind was made up. He would ask Makralla to pair with him. He wanted that smile at his back for as much more life as the two of them might have, if he could have it. If she accepted the pairing, they could talk of eggs later. Neither of them was so old that they didn't have many breeding years left, and more years after that to raise children. It was easy to forget your age in the Scouts, where you quickly grew old in wisdom, cynicism, and sometimes despair.

Certainly there would be no eggs until they were both out of the Scouts. With the Cylons able to strike anywhere and chaos ready to break out where the Cylons didn't, brood mothers and cell keepers were no longer as reliable as they once were. With the best will in the world, they were apt to think at least as much of their own skins as of the eggs or children under their care.

How soon would he and Makralla go to ground? On the one hand, they were both trained Scouts -- two of the best in the Sector, some said. They had something of an obligation to stay in space as long as they could -- not to reverse the inevitable flow toward the victory of the Cylons, but perhaps to salvage as much from the flood as possible.

On the other hand, he remembered how danger to Makralla was beginning to affect him. When would it start affecting his judgment to the point where both of them would be safer, even more useful, on the ground?

He realised his thoughts had led him in a full circle, back to a question he'd already decided was for the moment unanswerable. He also realised the passageway was making a slow curve to the left.

Urun signalled Makra to stay where she was while he flattened himself against the wall and worked his way around the bend. He found himself in a section of passageway blackened by the smoke and scarred by the fragments from a small explosion. Bare, twisted piping sagged from overhead, where panelling had been blown away, and a door in the right wall stood ajar.

Urun signalled Makra forward, and she stood guard in the passage while he slipped through the door. The compartment beyond seemed to be a storeroom of some sort, filled with shrouded machinery and metal crates that might hold anything. A Cylon lay beside one of the crates, a blackened hole in its chest and one leg blown off.

"Another dead Cylon," he called back. "When you've seen one, you've seen them all." He was bending down to try reading the labels on one of the crates when he heard Makra cry out. As he straightened up and turned toward the door, he heard the first explosion.

(To be continued.)

EDITORIAL: POLITICS, 1980

Ah, politics. It's that time again, when the mundane United States gears itself up for its regular "Let's See Who's the Most Mediocre" contest. Once every four years, presidential politics becomes a part of the American scene, and even the non-political world becomes involved in the political game.

Yes, politics even affects science fiction fandom, much though many -- indeed, most -- of us would like to avoid it. It even affects GALACTICA fandom...

The time has come, therefore, for us to make our one and only fannish political statement.

It has come to our attention that certain individuals have been claiming to represent "Purple and Orange?" or an offshoot publication of "Purple and Orange?" -- even though they have no right to do so. The following statement is being made to protect this publication, its staff, and its readers.

"PURPLE AND ORANGE?" IS NOT NOW AND NEVER HAS BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH ANY OTHER PUBLICATION, FANNISH OR OTHERWISE. WE DO NOT INTEND TO BE SO ASSOCIATED AT ANY TIME IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. ANY STATEMENTS TO THE CONTRARY, UNLESS THEY APPEAR IN PRINT ON THIS EDITORIAL PAGE IN SOME FUTURE ISSUE, ARE TO BE CONSIDERED INVALID. ANYONE HEARING SUCH FALSE STATEMENTS IS ASKED TO PLEASE REPORT THEM TO "PURPLE AND ORANGE?" AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, SO THAT WE MAY TAKE WHATEVER ACTION IS DEEMED APPROPRIATE.

As a general suggestion to any of our readers who might be unsure as to who actually represents this publication, we advise you to consult the staff listing at the end of this current issue. Anyone not listed as a member of our formal editorial staff -- editors, assistant editors, and instigator -- does not represent "Purple and Orange?" and has no right to claim to do so. Anyone in doubt about this should consult with our editors.

Now, enough said. "Purple and Orange?" does not want to become involved in fannish or any other politics. Indeed, we will not become involved in any sort of political dealings. We exist as the only legitimate publication of Battlestar OSIRIS. Our purpose is to entertain our readers, to offer examples of how good GALACTICA-universe fiction can be, to provide a workshop for fan writers and artists -- indeed, to become a forum for GALACTICA fans and for science fiction fans in general.

And just what is Battlestar OSIRIS? At present, it is a loose organisation of GALACTICA fans, all of whom have created original characters aboard the battlestar-turned-exploration-ship OSIRIS. Anyone wanting to become a part of this organisation can do so simply by introducing his or her GALACTICA-universe character to us. The character must be original (we do not want a score of Starbucks, Adamas, Athenas, etc.) and must be wholly a part of the GALACTICA universe (no half-Vulcans, Jedi Knights, etc.). In addition, the charac-

ter must be serving aboard the OSIRIS, although he or she can have been a refugee picked up after the destruction of the Colonies. Just write us a story about your character -- or, if you're not a writer, just send us an outline of who your character is, what he or she does, what his or her background is; one of our writers will attempt to add the character to some other story.

If for some reason a character is not acceptable, we will let you know -- and we will also let you know why, so you can make changes if you want.

Sounds interesting? Might be fun? Well, then, go ahead and try it. We all know a battlestar can accommodate a crew of thousands...

Now, some news, although it may not be news to many of our readers. MCA's syndicated package of twelve two-hour GALACTICA TV movies will be on the air this fall in cities around the United States. Some of the cities showing this package are Atlanta, Georgia; Boston, Massachusetts; Champaign, Illinois; Dallas, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Honolulu, Hawaii; Indianapolis, Indiana; Las Vegas, Nevada; Los Angeles, California; Louisville, Kentucky; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Nashville, Tennessee; New York, New York; Orlando, Florida; Portland, Oregon; St. Louis, Missouri; Sacramento, California; Salt Lake City, Utah; San Antonio, Texas; Spokane, Washington; and Washington, D.C.

What's the matter with the rest of the independent television stations around the country -- including those in our home city of Chicago, Illinois? If all the GALACTICA fans around the country -- and, as we have learned this past year, there are a great many of us -- write to their local television stations to request these films, we just might get some results.

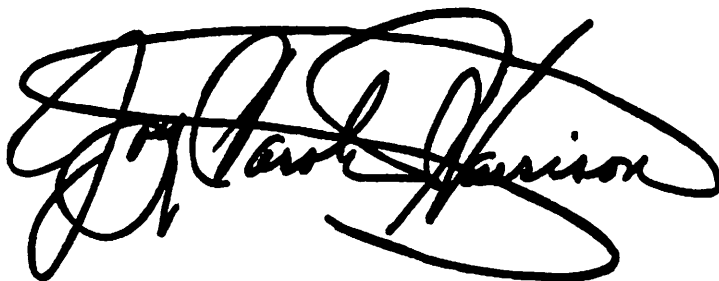
Let's try it, shall we? After all, it has worked in the past. So what have we got to lose?

As a final piece of information, especially for all fans of "Purple and Orange?" -- our next issue, #8, will be available some time in the spring, in late April or early May of 1981. In the interim, we will be publishing an adults-only issue, which will not be sold by mail. We hasten to point out, however, that any material appearing in our "blue" issue will continue to meet our high standards in both literature and art -- and all such material will be in good taste.

Our "blue" issue will be available only at conventions and should make its first appearance at Capricon 1 in Evanston, Illinois, in February of 1981. Issue #8 will appear either at Minnecon 1981, Easter weekend in Minneapolis, or at MediaWestCon in Lansing, Michigan, over the Memorial Day weekend.

See you all next year. And from our entire staff to all our readers:

HAVE A VERY HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON!!



Joy Harrison
Senior Editor

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'Twas the night before Xmas
And the P & O staff
Was missing their deadline,
'Cause they'd gotten smashed...



Season's Greetings from
the staff of Purple and Orange?

